THE

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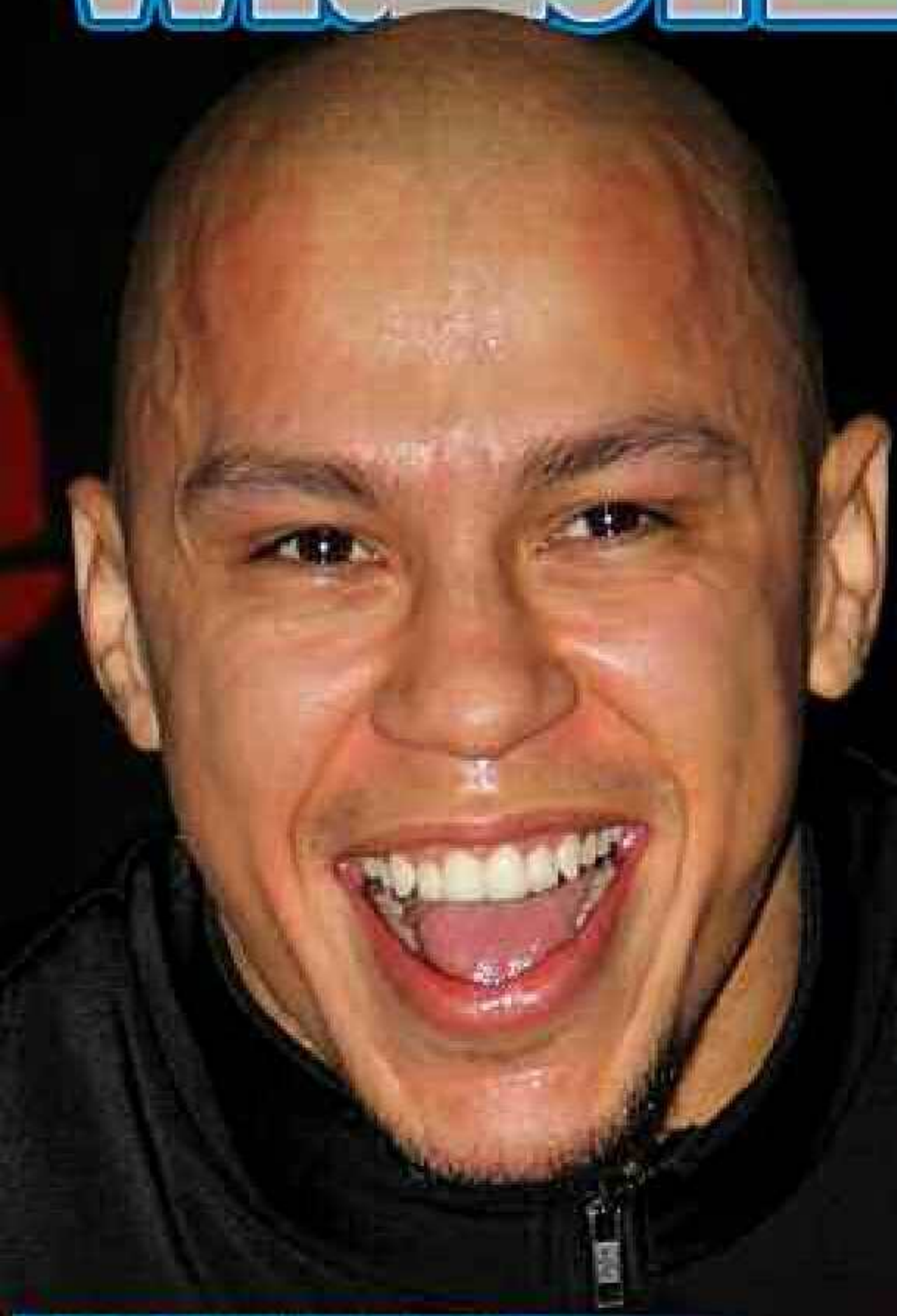
WRESTLING Press



WIN!!!
WWE ALL STARS
JR'S BBQ SAUCE
SIGNED LOW KI
T-SHIRT

LOW KI
INTERVIEW

Shinsuke Nakamura

KING OF TRIOS FOR DUMMIES

Triple H vs Undertaker

RETURN OF THE ROCK

112 PAGE BUMPER EDITION

THE WRESTLEMANIA EXPERIENCE
UNSUNG MATCHES OF WRESTLEMANIA

WRESTLEMANIA SPECIAL

THE WRESTLING PRESS ISSUE 13

April 2011

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Low Ki by Scott Finkelstein

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Message from the Editor

It's officially that time again, the time we all love, the time when wrestling fans all over the world get very excited, talking in unison about that one special event.

Yep, it's definitely that time again. So my trusty **TWP** reader's, you may now rejoice as it is my pleasure to reveal this month's shiny new issue of **TWP** Magazine.

Inside you will obviously notice that all of us here in the virtual offices of **TWP**, have been hard at work once again to make sure that you get your monthly dose of the best professional wrestling coverage in the world.

One thing that we have worked hard on for this issue is placing real emphasis on featuring more of the US independent wrestling scene. We really hope that this is evident.

With it being WrestleMania season an idea that was created in the virtual office was to detail **TWP** readers and writers experiences of attending WrestleMania. This was a really interesting idea and one that I hope you find a really good read. Check it out from page 104.

Also I'd just like to shill the two competitions that we have running this month. We have four bottles of good ol' JR'S BBQ sauce and four copies of the new WWE computer game WWE All-Stars (PAL, UK region only unfortunately) to give away and in our second competition we have an official t-shirt and signed picture from the one and only Low Ki. See pages 10 and 27 for details.

So be sure to check out those competitions and enter to win these great prizes we have on offer this month.

Once again I would like to thank everyone associated with **TWP** and I would also like to thank you the readers, without you **TWP** would not be around.

Please get in touch if you have any ideas or suggestions for future **TWP** issues, you can e-mail me at dtwooduk@hotmail.com

In the meantime enjoy WrestleMania folks!

DARREN WOOD (Magazine Editor) – **dtwooduk@hotmail.com**

With thanks....

Darren has been working very closely with the writing staff who are all greatly appreciated – of course there'd be no magazine without them. Likewise, I rely strongly on the assistance of great photographers who also deserve a virtual round of applause. So in no particular order I'd like to thank the following – Tony Knox (find him on flickr), David Seto, Scott Finkelstein (getlostphotography), Sarah Barraclough (BritishWrestlingPictures.com), Chris Evers (ChrisEversPhotography), John Smolek (turnbucklephotography.com) and Sam Lamantia (s.lamantia@comcast.net).

GREG (Design & Layout)

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WITH DAVID SCHMIDA

The Wrestling Press goes from strength to strength. This month, I'd like to bring some of our newest editions to the team of writers closer to you. The Wrestling Genius, Jared Gebhardt lets you have a portion of his genius trains of thoughts on Thursdays while Friday is the day for Jamie Kennedy's "Mat Musings". In combination with Todd Matthy's RAW recaps you'll be fully provided with opinions and thoughts on the most important occurrences in the big leagues. If you're looking for absorbing and insightful columns by one of Europe's most successful wrestlers, "The Canadian Rebel" StarBuck, **TWP** Online is the right place for you. The review section has really flourished as well. Here **TWP**'s writers share their opinions not only on the big productions published by the leading organisations but also offer their views on the DVDs released by the independent wrestling organisations. Have a day!

© Sam Lamantia

LOW KI

INTERVIEW

Conducted by **DARREN WOOD**

Just going back in time to when you left TNA in 2007, what were your feelings when you departed and did you have an idea that you may be heading towards WWE?

I was there until December 2007 and when I left my first thoughts were of going back to Japan, I wasn't intent on being in WWE or was that on my mind at that time. I wanted to go back to Japan and re-establish myself as a star in Japan.

Did you always want to go to WWE; was that company somewhere you aspired to be?

It was never a goal of mine; a lot of people misunderstand that. Simply because the WWE is the biggest company in the world, it was never my dream. I'm sure for others they have always wanted to go to WWE but for my goal it was always to go to Japan and to be accepted by the Japanese culture as a competitor.

OTHERS HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO GO TO WWE BUT MY GOAL WAS ALWAYS TO GO TO JAPAN

Please describe your feelings, emotions and where you were when you got the call from WWE expressing their interest in signing you to a contract.

It was more of a try out situation where they had me participate in some of the live events that were being held. Before I even went out in front of a live crowd, they had me doing workouts in the ring with some of their wrestlers. I participated in three back to back matches prior to that Monday Night Raw on November 3rd 2008. I guess they were testing me out to see what my conditioning was as far as my technique and after that there was still no guarantee that anything would happen. Lucky enough one of the main event guys went to the office and he asked them 'what's the point in all of this when he's already accomplished enough'. They then gave me a match the following day on November 4th and I wrestled Primo Colon that night and they then offered me a contract.

You have had many try-out matches for WWE in the past. When you went for these particular try-outs in 2008 did you have a feeling that nothing would come of them like before?

I did think it would be different because of time and my experience. Back when I first started wrestling for WWE was in 2000 and I wrestled on and off with them for two years. I always had support off the audience and seemed to have good praise from the company themselves but at that particular time I wasn't what they were looking for. I didn't take it as a personal issue I just kept moving on with my own business. At the same time I think because I had that past I developed a following for my career and the time and experience gained from my previous matches with them to the try-outs in 2008 helped me gain more attention from them.

© Scott Finkelstein

© Scott Finkelstein

When you signed with WWE was anything promised to you or did they make light of any plans they had for you?

No, any company that I have ever joined has never detailed what they want from me or would like to do with me. They just take everything one step at a time which is logical. Initially WWE just brought me into the company, had a look to see if I needed any polishing. I actually went down to FCW voluntarily because the person I am I wanted to make sure my skills were sharpened and to maintain my skills. Unfortunately at FCW I injured my knee and that kept me out for nine months.

WWE is the biggest company in the world with a tremendous amount of competition for the top spots in the company. When coming into the company was this something that you worried about?

No because I already knew what the environment entailed, it's a very big political game. If you play that political game you stand a much better chance of succeeding in a particular role or position. Im not a politician I am part of a different generation, I don't see the need in playing these games especially when the business is suffering. Why hire all these guys that they are who have no care for this profession in the first place why not hire the best man for the job? My intent has always been to go out there and work harder than everyone else.

What was the training like at FCW and what techniques or skills did you learn there?

It's a difference in styles, it's more fundamentally sound as opposed to a lot of places outside of the company. The independent US circuit is very jumbled, there isn't much of a solid foundation for much of the wrestlers as far as basic technique, body control, ring awareness that sort of thing. I think that's why WWE make guys go to their training

© Sam Lamantia

facilities before bringing them up to the main roster to find out if they are fundamentally sound in the first place before they can progress to the next stage.

What were your thoughts when you were announced to be on NXT season 2?

I didn't really have any; I just wanted to get out of FCW. I had already been waiting over a year to be called up to the main roster and when they announced I would be on NXT season 2 I knew it was my opportunity to show what I could do on the grand stage.

Did you find it disrespectful in any way that you were put on NXT, which is essentially a show to get rookies over?

Well, like I said earlier I knew the WWE environment coming in. I knew there were a lot of games played. To me it was another challenge, that's the way I saw it. They wanted to see how well I would do under pressure, they wanted to see how I would do when put in a particular situation. They wanted to see how tough I was and if I could stand there for the long run. I don't think it was disrespect I just think they wanted to see what I got.

What did you think about the pairing with Lay-cool on NXT season 2, did you find this disrespectful?

Initially I had none, a lot of people took exception to it I guess because how over the top their personalities are but I didn't think anything of it. Again I saw it as a challenge, how I was going to adapt to this situation, how am I going to make the best of it. At first I was a little curious as to what they were trying to do but I think it all worked out for the best because I got along great with those two women.

As part of NXT they were called your mentors, what (if anything) did they teach you?

I think the biggest effect they had on me was relaxing me, up until that point I had been more of a fighter, more sports orientated less entertainment based. If I had been more of a fighter in WWE then I probably wouldn't have lasted very long at all. I think that because their personalities were so over the top it actually relaxed me and they had me laughing a whole bunch, from the entire time we worked together so because of that it helped me improve and fit in with ease instead of developing this sort of tunnel vision to fight.

© Sam Lamantia

What were your thoughts on winning NXT and your thoughts on the idea of NXT overall?

Winning NXT to me was a great feeling. The final of it was in Buffalo, NY and I'm born and raised in New York City. So to win that programme after all these years of trying to make it on the biggest stage, it was fulfilling to finally go back home and win the programme at home. I almost broke down when I dropped to my knees after they announced my name; it was 13 years up until that point of developing my craft. As for NXT itself I can see that they are trying to offer variety, but for me there is only so much of that stuff that you're willing to sit through and watch. I think sometimes its misleading saying these guys are going to be the stars of tomorrow but we will make them look like fools. I'm not a fan of it, the stars of tomorrow should be showcased why they are that and shouldn't necessarily do some of the things they are made to.

Could WWE have done a lot more with you, did they drop the ball?

The company could have done a lot more with this, I think people have to be very careful as to who they say the company didn't do much. There is only one man who makes decisions, he says yes or no and that needs to be made clear. I'm not going to even mention his name but the company has their own view on who is going to be a star or not. If you don't fill in that particular prototype or that idea then you are going to have a more challenging time in regards to a push or trying to excel. I feel that the company could have been behind me a lot more but not just me they could be behind a lot of guys more. I came to work every day and I took pride in everything that I did, I show that every time I step In the ring whether it is for WWE, TNA whoever. I take pride in my profession and every time I come to work I come to make sure that at the end of the night people are getting their money's worth when they watch me.

Do you think because of your 13 years in the business without WWE they maybe had a vendetta against you?

WWE was just a bonus for everything I had worked hard for in this business, it was never a dream. I took a different path to most of the guys who are coming into WWE now and I think because I made a name for myself outside of the company, I can't be recognised as a WWE guy. I was never made by the company and I do think that was an issue, its almost like this is the biggest company in the world but they don't have that stamp on me because I made a name for myself all around the world before entering. They would much rather take pride in saying they created you and I think that went against me.

© Sam Lamantia

A story on the internet is making the rounds that WWE's creative team was told to bury you after you won NXT season 2 is there any truth to this rumour?

No one has ever said anything to my face or to me personally. I think it was obvious though by the way they were scheduling my matches. I was chosen to win NXT season 2 by the fans, they wanted to see me do well and it seemed like the company wanted me to do well. But the way they were using me I think the writing was on the wall.

There are conflicting reports on the internet, just so we make sure did you leave WWE or did they release you?

Yes, we both agreed that it would be best if we didn't continue doing business together at this current time. They had no path for me, or no plans in the near future so instead of wasting my time, wasting my body in that company I decided it was time to move on. I've had a good relationship with them the entire time I was there regardless of what people may think. I have always had strong relationships everywhere I have gone; there are no bad feelings from either end.

Would you go back to WWE at all in the future and is MMA an option for you?

I would have to think hard about going back if the situation occurred again. I will always go where my experience takes me and this was no different. At the moment business is down in pro wrestling and I can't

Courtesy of Low Ki, ©WWE

really say where I would like to go I have obviously had strong connections in the past with ROH and TNA. Have been asked if I would go to MMA but I am a professional wrestler it's what I've spent the last 13 years crafting. Of course I have a lot of respect for MMA fighters but a lot of pro wrestlers go into MMA, get their butt kicked and then their reputation for wrestling is harmed, I wouldn't want that to happen. I just want to get back to work and continue wrestling.

I believe that because of your release you are under the standard 90 day no compete clause from your WWE contract is this right? If so is it just a case for you now to continue to keep your name out there and keep recognition high?

Absolutely you have to stay active, if you don't continue doing something of quality or value in this business you are lost and forgotten. The nature of this profession is you have to stay in the picture and anywhere I go because of my recent association with the biggest company in the world I have the chance to bring business to wherever I go.

I can't comment on other guys who have left or wanted their release. But If you're not happy there then just leave, simple as that. A lot of the times I think the public misunderstand that they are not happy because of the way they are treated, these are men who take pride in their profession and their skills and once you get into the environment when you are unhappy going to work day in and day out it can be hard. WWE is a business, there are a

lot of extremely gifted athletes in the WWE are they neccesariily used to the bets of their abilities, probably not. Some guys there are not happy but they are sucking it up and taking it because it's about their families and supporting them. I knew guys who were worried about being released.

I don't know I guess the nature of the company at the moment is one week for example Wade Barrett could be on a hot streak then the next he may not be. The potential is always there for anybody but it's a question of whether the backing is there.

Thanks very much for the interview; I wish you every success in the future. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Please could you all follow my twitter which is why I started the United Warriors Project, a social inquiry to see the reach & power of the social network by reaching as many countries as possible by 2.14.1. Thanks for all your support and keep watching…

■ **Contact: Darren at dtwooduk@hotmail.com**

WIN!! WIN!! WIN!! WIN!!! WIN!!!

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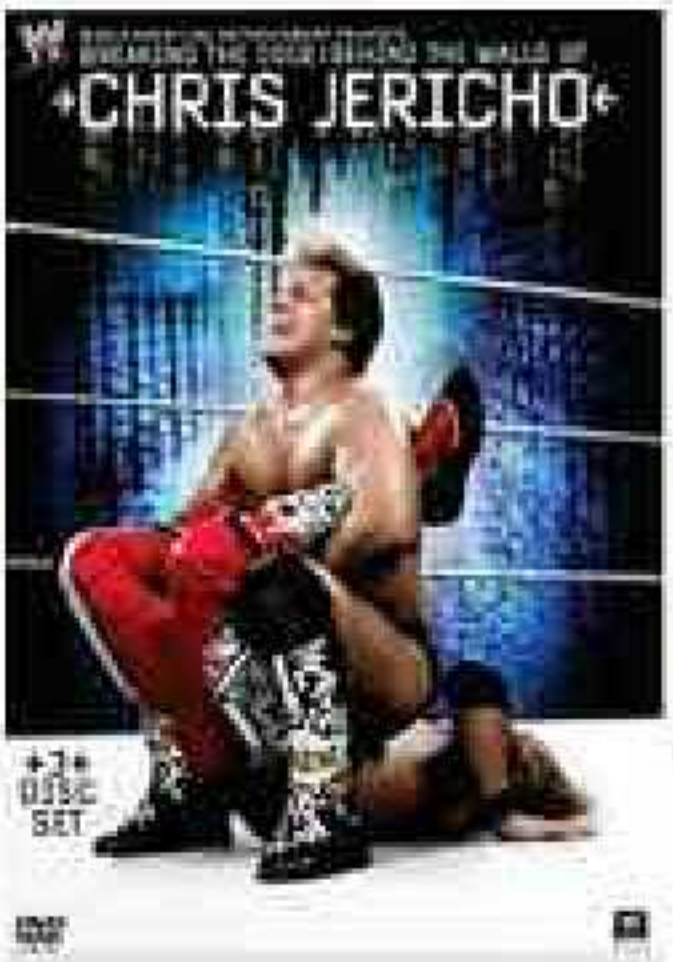

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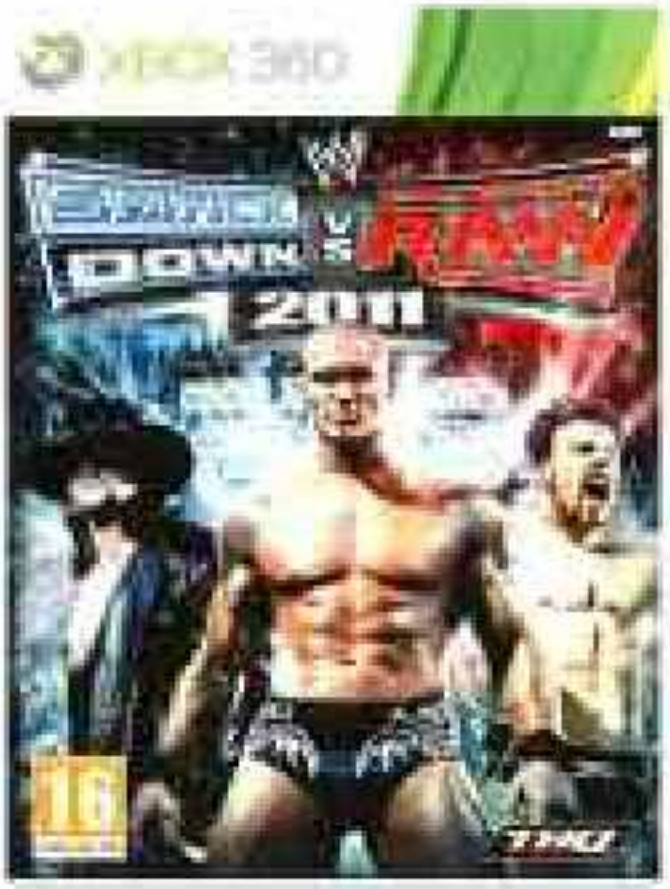

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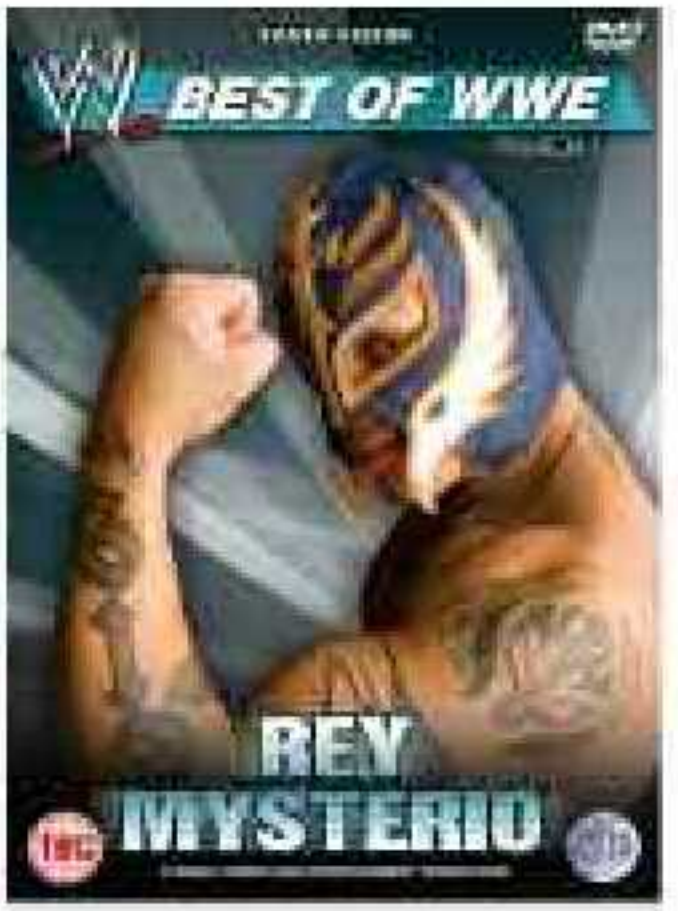

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THE good AND bad OF THE ROCK'S RETURN

Words **MATT WATERS**

After 33 weeks since being assaulted by Wade Barrett and the Nexus, Vince McMahon returned to Monday Night Raw and dropped a bombshell on the WWE Universe. Mr. McMahon informed us that this year's Wrestlemania would have a special guest host. Immediately the repressed memories of Jeremy Piven and the cast of 2010 film *McGruber* flashed through people's minds.

But Vince assured us that only one man was up to the task, a man who personified special attraction. Speculation ran rampant about the identity of who the host would be of the biggest event on the wrestling calendar, with everyone from Bob Barker to Stone Cold Steve Austin being considered candidates.

Seven days later, when it was revealed the announcement would take place in Raw's main event spot ahead of John Cena vs CM Punk it all but confirmed everybody's dream candidate. Every light in the building was switched off one by one as the sound of electrical surges played throughout the arena, further hinting at what many already knew to be true: The Rock was back.

The WWE hadn't heard an ovation so thunderous in a long time and Rocky soaked up every second of it, not saying a word for nearly five minutes whilst thousands of fans chanted his name. When 'The Great One' finally spoke it was as if he'd never left, dusting off his signature catch phrases in a fifteen minute promo that saw him give Michael Cole the dressing down the world has been awaiting for the better part of a year.

The 'Voice of the WWE' wasn't the only one to receive verbal jabs from The People's Champion however; Rocky sounded off on WWE Champion The Miz and John Cena, the man that has spent seven years trying to fill his shoes, acknowledging the well-reported criticisms Cena has fired Rock's way over the years.

HE IS REMINDING US ALL THAT CENA AND THE MIZ JUST AREN'T AS GOOD....

It was speculated that Vince tried to no avail to put together a match between the two for Wrestlemania 26. But given all that has transpired recently and all the money it would generate the idea of this true dream match finally coming to fruition somewhere down the road seems more plausible than ever before. The Rock's speech on Raw seemed to hint that the nine-time world champion is here for more than just a guest-hosting gig as he vowed he would never go away and that he was "back."

But what precisely is The Rock back for? First and foremost he is the WWE's head cheerleader for their annual extravaganza. The Rock amassed over 100,000 Twitter followers within 24 hours of his return. The WWE universe was encouraged to visit his Facebook page. The Rock is Vince's most powerful promotional tool heading towards the grandest stage of them all.

> **After all, very few wrestlers from the modern era have the name value that carries the mainstream gravitas of The Rock's.**

Just as the involvement of Donald Trump and Floyd Mayweather helped earn Wrestlemania buys from casual viewers in years past, the return of The Rock will ensure that anyone remotely interested in wrestling will be glued to their television on April 3.

His second function is the most obvious: hosting Wrestlemania. The Rock stated he's going to be working closely with the backstage

© John Smolek

crew to ensure the fans get a show like never before. This isn't going to be ZZ Top appearing in a backstage segment, or a pair of NASCAR drivers racing around outside the building.

The Rock seems intent on suturing the entire event together, not just cutting promos, but getting involved with the wrestlers if necessary; The Rock promised that at the drop of a hat he would lay the smack down.

Rock in 2001
© Tom Kralidis

And that brings us to his third potential function: wrestling. It seems a safe bet that Vince will do everything in his power to try and persuade Rocky to step into the ring with John Cena to make good on all the verbal bombs the two have dropped on each other. For several weeks Raw has become must-see television as the millions (and millions) eagerly watched the insults and mockery fly back and forth between two of the most popular wrestlers of all time, hoping it would end with a physical confrontation.

On paper that is an amazing match, but at age 38 and with seven years of ring-rust can Rocky still go? He certainly looks the part, his Hollywood career demanding he stay in top condition, but can his body take the punishment it used to?

One would have to believe that if he does agree to wrestle it would be just the once, so even if he was sore the next day, he could bring his A-Game for one night only. After all, who else besides John Cena could be paired with The Rock to create such a highly anticipated match? Verily, this decade's Rock vs Hogan would be Cena vs Rock, with The Rock playing Hogan's role this time around. It would be a challenge to book a more intriguing match in this day and age.

But there are some negatives that are being ignored amidst all the "fruity pebbles" and battle raps; the WWE are in the middle of a youth movement with fresh faces making their way to the top of the card. With that in mind, the WWE are playing a dangerous game by inviting past stars such as Rock, Austin (46), Booker T (45), and Kevin Nash (51) back to the WWE, even if it is just for occasional appearances.

These men can't be relied upon to lead the company into the future, that job will fall to the current crop of stars. Common belief is that this new era just aren't as talented as those that came before, and if that's the case, standing the two generations in the ring for all the world to compare can't be a good move.

INSTEAD, THIS SHOULD BE LOOKED AT AS A CHALLENGE FOR THE NEW GENERATION

Look at Nash's crowd reaction at the Royal Rumble: almost the entire current main event scene were occupying the ring at the time he stepped over the top rope, yet during the time Nash was in the ring the crowd lost all interest in those that were going to have the strongest chance of headlining Wrestlemania.

The same happens when The Rock appears. John Cena and The Miz are still going to be wrestling ten years from now, at which point

'The Brahma Bull' will be pushing 50 years old. With every incredible promo The Rock cuts, every awe-inspiring entrance he makes, he is reminding us all that Cena and The Miz just aren't as good.

Surely the last thing the WWE want is for their audience to realise their current product leaves little to be desired compared to that of decades previous? Quite the opposite it would seem, as Michael Cole and Jerry Lawler are constantly harping on about recent events being the most shocking in WWE history, or wrestlers being the best, anything to make us believe we should be interested in the here and now.

To quote what Hulk Hogan said in a recent interview with Peter Rosenberg: *"They've spent so much time building John Cena up... but all of a sudden within three or four seconds, [The Rock] had the whole arena screaming that Cena sucks."* It's a reasonable point considering Cena's popularity wavers enough as it is.

But perhaps this shouldn't be thought of as a bygone legend overshadowing the new guys, reminding us how wrestling just isn't the same as it used to be. Instead, this should be looked at as a challenge for the new generation.

It has been said the only way to improve is to face someone who is better than you, and with microphone skills somewhat lacking nowadays, could there be a better person to learn from than The Rock? Everyone who is given the nod to interact with The Rock in even the smallest way will bring their absolute A-game because he will demand it of them and their pride won't let them back down.

The premise of *Tough Enough* (set to return the night after Wrestlemania) is wrestling legends imparting knowledge so that the torch may be passed on, and The Rock's return to the WWE can work in the same way. The Rock isn't back for one more moment in the spotlight – he has an abundance of that in his day job – he's back as a valuable asset to the WWE, an asset that they should do their best to utilize in teaching the youngsters a thing or three about the wrestling business.

© John Smolek

How many times do we hear that Randy Orton is no Stone Cold and John Cena is no Rock? Well, perhaps with help from the man himself, we could see marked improvements from the company's top babyface.

Or perhaps a decade into his career, and only 5 years The Rock's junior, it's too late for Cena to change. And given how popular he is with the demographic the WWE treasures most (the kids) does he even need to change?

One thing is for certain: John Cena rises to an occasion. Say what you will about his Superman routine, Cena is impressive when he needs to be, and if he's going to be exchanging more words or even some fists with The Rock then he needs to be more impressive than ever.

With so many what if's, only one thing is for sure: whatever The Rock does and whoever he does it with, it'll be the very definition of must-see viewing.

Contact Matt at matt_waters2@hotmail.com

the stars of Tomorrow

Words **JOHN MILNER**

Nothing lasts forever. Especially not a career in pro wrestling.

No matter how deeply entrenched one might be in the WWE Main Event scene, eventually their spot becomes vacant.

Sometimes it's backstage politics. Sometimes it's opportunity for a career outside the ring. Sometimes it's simply that their body can no longer take the pounding they must endure on a nightly basis. No one can forever escape the wear and tear that pro wrestling eventually takes on them.

There was a time when it seemed Hulkamania would run wild forever, that the Rock would always be "the Most Electrifying Man in Sports Entertainment", that Shawn Michaels would forever be "the Showstopper."

But all three men, and a bevy of others, from Bret Hart to Batista, eventually had to give up their share of the spotlight.

For any wrestling company to be successful there must be replacements for those who have had to step aside. For many years, a criticism of the WWE was that there was too much emphasis placed on long-established stars like Triple H, Shawn Michaels and even John Cena.

No one doubts that a returning Triple H and the presence of John Cena will earn at least their fair share of the focus of the Federation for some time to come. However, the WWE looks to be in good shape, should Triple H decide he'd rather spend some time behind the scenes, in his new role of Senior Adviser or should Cena get another movie role.

For a long time, it was Smackdown that seemed to be where the future of the WWE could be found. After the "Brand Extension" of March

2002, Smackdown was, to many fans, "the Wrestling Show" (as opposed to the Entertainment Show of Raw). Almost straight out of the gate, there was the draw of "the Smackdown Six" (Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, Edge, Rey Mysterio and Eddie and Chavo Guerrero).

And while those days may have passed, Smackdown still has much to offer in terms of drawing viewers to stay in on Friday nights. John Cena, CM Punk, and the Miz all "came of age" so to speak on Smackdown, and others, from Rey Mysterio to Batista earned championship accolades on the blue brand.

But where is the "next generation" that will carry Smackdown into the future? Certainly, the answer, to some, might be "right there on your TV screen." Those would point to Smackdown roster members such as former Intercontinental Champion Drew McIntyre, former Tag Champion Cody Rhodes, former World Champion Jack Swagger and the man who will be heading to Wrestlemania, Alberto Del Rio.

And yes, there is a long list of young stars, just a few years into the organization, who are showing up on Smackdown every week. And yes, some of those guys listed above will certainly find

© Sarah Barraclough

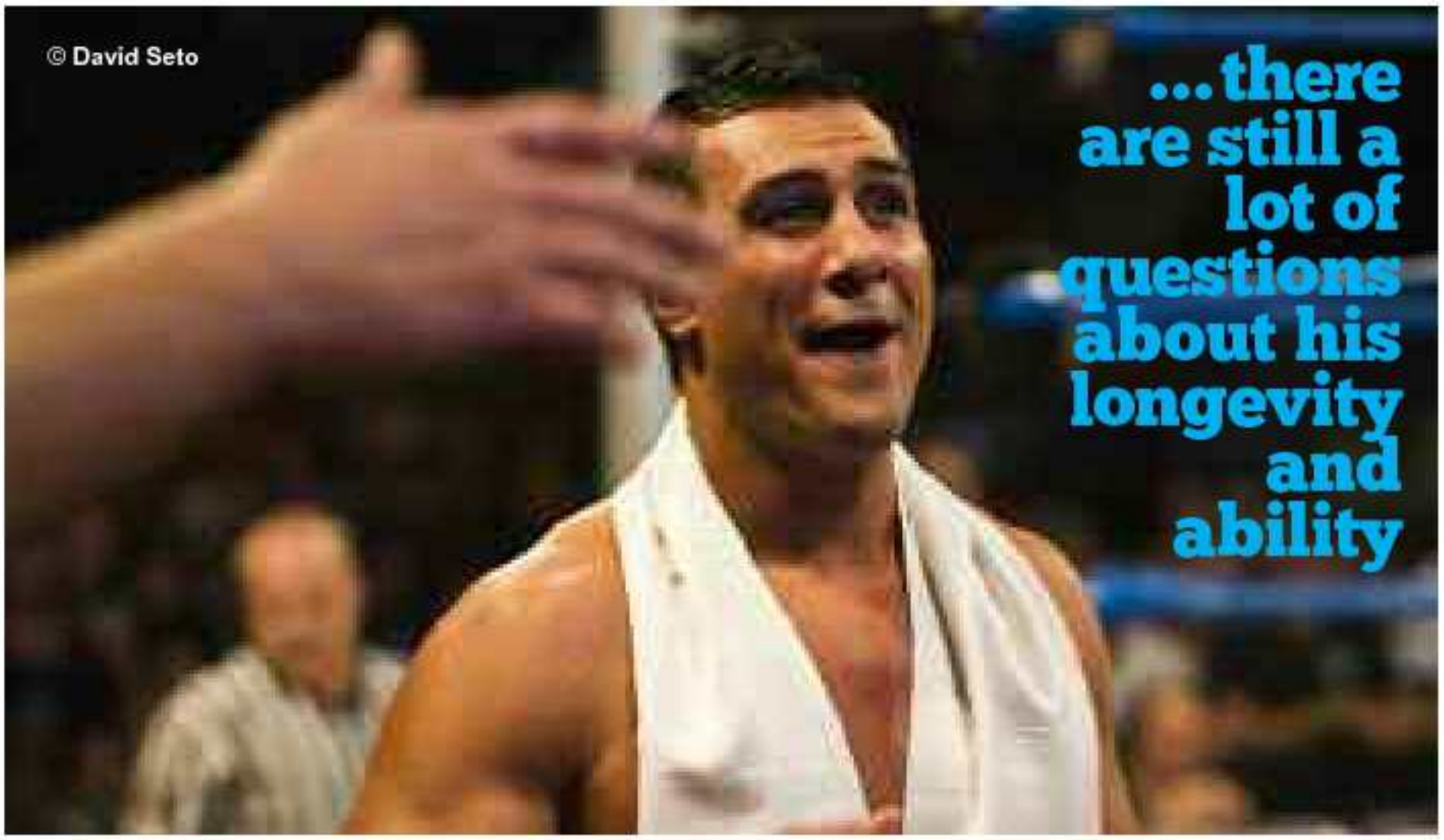
© John Smolek

themselves in main event and title matches over the course of the next few years (barring a major injury or a departure from the WWE).

But is there anyone among them who could "take the ball and run with it" to use some football terminology? Once upon a time any one of them probably could have been looked at and dubbed "the next breakout superstar". Swagger had that Kurt Angle vibe to him. Rhodes had the lineage of his father and brother. McIntyre could have been "the Corporate Champion" with Vince McMahon in his corner. Wade Barrett has a great look to him, and was involved in the biggest angle in the entire company. Alberto Del Rio won the 2011 Royal Rumble, and is headed to the biggest match of his career.

While there is no shortage of stars with the potential to be the heir apparent to John Cena or Randy Orton, the WWE has shot themselves in the foot when it comes to preparing for that next generation.

For every would-be Smackdown standard bearer, there is a roadblock they must overcome on the road to legitimizing their status on the brand. And it is a roadblock placed there by the WWE itself.



Jack Swagger may have what it takes to be the next Kurt Angle, but he has to overcome what should have been one of the best things to happen in his career: he was crowned World Heavyweight Champion after cashing in his Money in the Bank title shot, just days after Wrestlemania. He was made to look weak against The Big Show, the Undertaker and even Randy Orton. Once he lost the title, he headed back to mid-card obscurity and he's remained there ever since.

Wade Barrett may soon be joining him. On Raw, he was main eventing against Cena and Orton. If he had remained on Raw, with the newly formed Corre of talented newcomers Justin Gabriel, David Otunga, Heath Slater and former ECW Champion Ezekiel Jackson, Barrett might have led his team into a Wargames-type match between the two factions. However, in the move to Smackdown, Barrett and the Corre seem to have lost a step or two. They're aren't quite the Vincent-led NWO B-Team, but they're heading that way.

In the course of about a year, Drew McIntyre went from being Mr. McMahon's Chosen One to an embarrassing feud against Teddy Long to trying to win over Kelly Kelly. **Not exactly a career path that leads you to the top of the brand.** Of course, McIntyre's fall from grace may have had more to do with his real-life issues with his wife, former WWE Diva Tiffany. No matter the reason, the WWE seems to have allowed McIntyre to fall off the radar in terms of their long-range plans to elevate their next break-out star.

And speaking of long-range plans, perhaps that's the explanation for Cody Rhodes' recent career path. After months of Rhodes giving grooming tips more often than we saw him in the ring, it may finally be paying off with a feud with Rey Mysterio over the possibility that Rey's 619 may have altered Cody's "dashing" facade. However, one should point out that while most people remember Rick Martel as the Model, he was never even close to leading the company, the way he did in the AWA as champion without the embarrassing gimmick.

While Drew McIntyre will spend Wrestlemania mooning over Kelly Kelly, and Jack Swagger may be hoping to repeat his performance in

Money in the Bank, Alberto Del Rio may have the best chance of anyone to rise to the next level, earning his way into a World title match.

Already leaked to be "the next big thing", Del Rio has taken Smackdown by such force that he's even been shipped over to Raw on numerous occasions. The 2011 Royal Rumble winner seems to be riding a rocket to the main event at Wrestlemania, gathering strength to run over Edge and grab the World Championship.

© John Smolek

But how "real" is Del Rio? For a guy who wasn't even on Smackdown a year ago, is Del Rio going to be the next Ric Flair, about to embark on the first of many title reigns, the next Jack Swagger, who went from mid-card to World title and back to mid-card in a few months, or the next Ultimate Warrior, who it seemed was destined for years of greatness, but faltered under the bright lights of the WWE?

Only time will tell.

Del Rio may be the guy Smackdown can point to and say "There's our next top guy", but there are still a lot of questions about his longevity and ability. If the hopes for Smackdown are pinned totally on Del Rio, what happens if he isn't who they expect him to be? As Rey Mysterio says in the "Don't Try This At Home" commercial, "injuries can happen at any time." If Del Rio were to go down with a fluke injury…what next?

Now of course, as the old saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day. And in wrestling, today's mid-card joke can be tomorrow's main event superstar. At the 1996 Survivor Series, no one would have been faulted for not expecting the "Blue Chipper" Rocky Miavia to become "the most electrifying man in sports entertainment". No one expected John Cena's rapper gimmick to catch on to the point where he would pick up where the Rock and "Stone Cold" Steve Austin left off in terms of being the face of the company and the entire industry.

> **There's nothing that says Jack Swagger, Drew McIntyre or Wade Barrett can't become the Edge or Rey Mysterio of tomorrow.**

In fact, the writers on Smackdown have even proven they can elevate someone who has a few stumbling blocks. Take Dolph Ziggler. For a long time, he was just a mid-carder whose gimmick was that he went around introducing himself to people.

But pair him with Vickie Guerrero and put him in a program against World Champion Edge? It wasn't Flair-Steamboat, but Ziggler became a much more entertaining heel main eventer than he probably had any right to be.

There is potential in any of the superstars named above, but for Smackdown to succeed tomorrow, the WWE needs to be planning today.

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Unsung Matches of WrestleMania

Words **PHIL AUSTIN**

Wrestlemania has a lot of moments in its rich history. Some of wrestling's most recognisable moments have happened at the biggest show of the year. From Hulk Hogan bodyslamming Andre the Giant, to Shawn Michaels and the Undertaker epic encounters, we can all vividly remember every moment of the biggest matches of the year at Wrestlemania. But for every Hogan vs. Warrior, or Steamboat vs. Savage, there are a bunch of matches at each Wrestlemania that don't provide those moments, yet are good in their own right.

I decided to journey back through all of the past Wrestlemania's and uncover some of these 'hidden gems'. These are the matches that are not fondly remembered, but make for some tremendous viewing.

So join us now for a trip down memory lane....or in many cases, a trip down 'no memory of that' lane!

What better place to start than where it all began...**Wrestlemania 1**.

The first Wrestlemania had a number of memorable moments. From the main event tag match of Hulk Hogan & Mr T v Paul Orndorff & Roddy Piper, Iron Sheik and Nikolai Volkoff winning the tag team titles, King Kong Bundy destroying S.D. Jones in seconds and the many celebrities on hand. The debut of Wrestlemania was a real spectacular start to the WWF's premier showcase.

But for all of the major stars, there were several undercard performers who were supremely talented. Tito Santana opened the show with a great bout with Buddy Rose (wrestling as the masked Executioner), while Junkyard Dog and Greg Valentine fought over the Intercontinental title.

But for me, the most underrated bout on the card features two gifted wrestlers. Ricky Steamboat would find future Wrestlemania success in his Wrestlemania 3 bout with Randy Savage, while Matt Borne would go on to become the evil Doink many years later.

This may not be the best Steamboat match you'll ever see, but it's certainly a tidy little bout. Steamboat gets to showcase his highflying and martial arts skills, while Borne plays a good heel role, and gets in some nice suplexes midmatch.

The first Wrestlemania may have been all about Hulk Hogan and the Rock 'N' Wrestling Connection but the gifted undercard competitors have always been a real staple of the WWF.

Wrestlemania 2 had the gimmick of three separate 'mini-Manias', which watered

down the show a little. Nassau in particularly ended up with a terrible bunch of matches, a disappointing Orndorff/Muraco bout and the 'main event' of the Roddy Piper v Mr T boxing match. This Mania featured a great British Bulldogs tag title win over the Dream Team, Hogan v King Kong Bundy in a cage, and the NFL/WWF battle royal.

It was a tag bout between two tough Texans and WWF stalwarts Tito Santana & Junkyard Dog that nearly stole the show, yet remains one of the least remembered bouts of any Mania. In fact, few even remember that Dory Funk Jr was even at Wrestlemania (which, given they called him 'Hoss Funk' is hardly surprising). Terry & Dory Funk really brought the hardcore here, with some great brawling, including using chairs and Wrestlemania's first table spot! It wasn't all brawling though, as all four men put on a great wrestling display resulting in a truly terrific tag team bout that would fit in as much today as it did in 1986.

If you don't know about **Wrestlemania 3**, then you don't know wrestling. A huge event, with ground-breaking moments such as Andre being slammed by Hogan, and Savage and Steamboat contesting an all-time classic, the third Wrestlemania was a spectacle. It also had some less memorable bouts.

Some, like Hercules v Billy Jack Haynes are unmemorable for good reason. But others, like my choice for this Wrestlemania's true 'hidden gem', are tremendous yet overshadowed by the sheer spectacle of the main matches.

Opening a Wrestlemania is a daunting prospect. Even more when it's the biggest one ever. So when you are a young tag team like the Can Am Connection (Tom Zenk and Rick Martel), you are glad to be going in there with two veterans like Bob Orton and Don Muraco. Together, the youth of the Can Ams and the experience of Orton and Muraco put together a great little tag team match. Crisp teamwork by the babyface team and great psychology by the heels made this one of the more enjoyable opening matches of Wrestlemania. Incidentally, the Rougeaus v Dream Team match on the same show is also well worth a watch!

Wrestlemania 4 is, to be honest, not the most thrilling of Wrestlemania's. A card laden with fairly dull matches, the show is memorable for the Savage title win, Bobby Heenan being attacked by Matilda, the Mania debut of the Ultimate Warrior, a tag title change and the opening battle royal. But the bulk of the card is made up of tournament matches that, for the most part, are pretty disappointing.

The tournament begins with a real 'hidden gem' however, as Ted Dibiase and Jim Duggan construct a nice tidy little brawling v science bout. And this should come as no surprise. After feuding in Mid South, the two really knew each other well, and it shows here, as they really gel well in this match. A great little bout to open a pretty dull tournament!

Wrestlemania 5 had a shockingly high proportion of good undercard bouts. From great tag matches like the Rockers vs. Twin Towers (including a hellacious clothesline from Akeem) and the Brainbusters vs. Strike Force, to surprisingly decent bouts like Beefcake vs. Dibiase and Hercules vs. Haku, the show remembered for the Mega Powers exploding and Rick Rude beating the Ultimate Warrior was awash with 'hidden gems'.

But when you put two great athletes in the ring together such as Mr Perfect and 'The Blue Blazer' Owen Hart, you're going to hard-pressed to find a better example of

great wrestling. Such was the case at Wrestlemania 5 when these two put on a brief clinic of how exciting wrestling could be. This is one that is worth going out of your way to see!

When you headline a Wrestlemania with Hulk Hogan vs. The Ultimate Warrior that is pretty much all you need to draw. As a result, the undercard of **Wrestlemania 6** was filled with 'afterthought' matches featuring the talented roster of the WWF at the time. From the Orient Express dragging a 'worse for wear' team of the Rockers to a decent bout to Rick Rude and Jimmy Snuka showing just how great they are, the show had several notable little gems.

But for every Mania, the opener is often as important as the main event. First impressions last, so for Wrestlemania 6 the WWF sent out two of their most reliable performers to open the show. Koko B Ware and Rick Martel had a really tidy encounter to kick off proceedings, showing just why they are two of the more underrated performers in the industry. A great little bout, which really defines the term 'hidden gem'.

And speaking of great opening matches...at **Wrestlemania 7**, everyone was talking about Ultimate Warrior vs. Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan vs. Sgt Slaughter. Next to nobody was discussing the Rockers upcoming battle with Haku and the Barbarian. Yet the opening match between these two teams was a blinder. Haku and Barbarian, one of the WWF's more underrated teams, hit some amazing power moves, including a vicious double clothesline by Barbarian, while the Rockers (in their final Wrestlemania match together) exhibited their 'tag team specialty' as Gorilla Monsoon liked to call it. Also worth checking out on this show is a tremendous power vs. power confrontation between the Warlord and the UK's own British Bulldog.

If you said that a Shawn Michaels single match would be on a list of Wrestlemania 'hidden gems', most modern wrestling fans would think you were crazy. HBK has been in more high profile, showstealing Mania matches than anyone else. Yet, at **Wrestlemania 8**, the Heartbreak Kid was a new singles wrestler on the scene, having only recently broken up his tag team and kicked his partner Marty Jannetty to the kerb (or through the window to be precise).

At Wrestlemania 8, while Bret Hart vs. Roddy Piper, Randy Savage vs. Ric Flair, and Hulk Hogan vs. Sid Justice were stealing the spotlight, Michaels and Tito Santana quietly put on another terrific opening bout. This would be Santana's Wrestlemania swansong, having appeared at every single one to this point, and he certainly went out on a high. A terrific bout, yet one that isn't instantly remembered by fans of Michaels' Mania career, this is a real highlight of Wrestlemania 8.

Wrestlemania 9 is not fondly remembered by fans. Almost universally acclaimed as one of the worst Wrestlemania's ever, the card featured Hulk Hogan and Brutus Beefcake going for the tag belts, Hogan stealing Bret Hart's thunder and taking a world title he never really wanted, two Doinks and Jim Ross debuting in a toga! But there was some pretty decent wrestling on there too. Shawn Michaels vs. Tatanka, Lex Luger vs. Mr Perfect, even Razor Ramon and Bob Backlund gave the fans something to cheer for. Then there was the real hidden gem on the card. Buried in the second match, the Steiners and the Headshrinkers each headed into their first Wrestlemania's determined to make an impact, and boy did they deliver! A hard-hitting, solid match between two teams that held nothing back, these guys brought their NWA rivalry to the WWF stage and

delivered an NWA/Japan style bout that put the rest of the card to shame. If you still look at Wrestlemania 9 as 'the one I can skip', then you need to go check out this bout at the very least!

Wrestlemania 10 is far more fondly remembered than the previous year's Mania. From the Shawn Michaels/Razor Ramon ladder match, to Bret vs. Owen, this is a Mania that is full of 'moments'. It's also full of terrific 'lesser remembered' bouts to. Allundra Blayze and Leilani Kai have a great little bout, and Bam Bam Bigelow & Luna face Doink & Dink in a bout that delivers more than you'd expect. But it's the Quebecers vs. Men on a Mission that is the real hidden gem here. The Quebecers are one of the more underrated of all the WWF tag teams. A solid and spectacular team, they show it here with some really innovative offence. And this has to be a standard performance for Men on a Mission too, who look better here than practically at any other time in their respective careers.

PLUS YOU GET THE RARE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE MR FUJI AS A BABYFACE MANAGER

Wrestlemania 11 was very heavily based on celebrity appearances. Not only is Lawrence Taylor one half of a main event and Pamela Anderson in the other, but the whole opening montage highlights celebrity over wrestlers. So it's a refreshing start to the show to have a decent tag team bout as the opener. Lex Luger and the British Bulldog, a team who had more promise than they had longevity battle the Blu Brothers with Dutch Mantell as Uncle Zebekiah in their corner. The bout is a decent big man tag bout with Luger and Bulldog highlighting their moveset throughout, and the heel twins using their switching tactics throughout the match. The fact that the ending comes with something other than one of the Bulldog or Luger's traditional finishers only adds to this bout.

Wrestlemania 12 has two equally great 'hidden gems' to offer. The opening six man, pitting Yokozuna, Jake Roberts and Ahmed Johnson against Davey Boy Smith, Owen Hart and Vader is a tremendous affair, highlighting especially just how underrated a performer Yokozuna was. This big man can really move. All of this, plus you get the rare opportunity to see Mr Fuji as a babyface manager, complete with patriotic Stars & Stripes flag-waving!

Just as good is the Wrestlemania debut of Steve Austin. Austin, managed by Dibiase takes on Savio Vega in a fine match. Mixing brawling and technical wrestling, Austin's punches are countered by some amazing Kwang-like kicks by Vega and, as much as the announcers keep trying to distract from the match by cutting to the Roddy Piper/Goldust 'chase' throughout, they can't take away from what is a tremendous, yet largely unremembered, match that gives a glimpse of the superstar that Austin would soon become.

When you mention **Wrestlemania 13**, you pretty much have one image in your mind: that of Steve Austin's bloody face locked in the sharpshooter. But with that match dominating the 13th Wrestlemania, it left plenty of 'hidden gems' amidst the rest of the card. From an enjoyable Triple H vs. Goldust bout to a six man street fight that spiralled out of control, the show has some terrific moments. But none is better than the tag title match pitting Davey Boy Smith and Owen Hart against Mankind and Vader. Putting two heel teams against each other was a risky move, but it worked and with four guys this talented in the ring together it leads to a tremendous fight.

Wrestlemania 14 had some big matches. Austin vs. Michaels, Rock vs. Shamrock, Triple H vs. Owen Hart and the first meeting of Undertaker vs. Kane. There really wasn't a lot of room for the little men to shine. Yet shine they did, when the WWF Light heavyweight champion TAKA Michinoku faced Mexican star Aguila (later to be Essa Rios). An abundance of high risk (and not always crisply executed) moves made for an exciting bout that would be unlike anything the WWF audience was used to seeing at that time. It may not be the best match in Wrestlemania history, but it was certainly a refreshing change.

When **Wrestlemania 15** rolled around, both New Age Outlaws had just picked up singles titles. Billy Gunn was the new Hardcore Champion and Road dogg was the new Intercontinental champion. Both were given multi man matches in which to defend their titles. While Gunn got Al Snow and Hardcore Holly as challengers, Road dogg got Ken Shamrock, Goldust and Val Venis. And it was this final collection of underrated talent that gave the true 'hidden gem' of Wrestlemania 15. A fine four way bout, all four guys worked their guts out and it paid off. A real bonus for fans who tuned in for the 'big matches' on the show.

There are a couple of 'hidden gems' at **Wrestlemania 2000**. Too Cool teams with Chyna to take on the Radicalz, while D'Lo Brown and the Godfather have a terrific opener with Bull Buchanan and the Bossman. But it's Al Snow and Steve Blackman vs. Test and Albert which is the real 'hidden gem' here. After all, if you saddle a match with a man dressed as a giant cheese at ringside, and it still manages to be a tremendously fought and enjoyable encounter, then that is quite the achievement.

The Acolytes, Farooq and Bradshaw, were always fun to watch in a straight up wild scrap, and **Wrestlemania 17** added Tazz and Jacqueline to the mix. Their battle with the Right to Censor crew was non-stop action all the way, and a fun encounter that got hidden amongst so much other good stuff on that year's card. But it's a hidden gem that is well worth looking up.

Wrestlemania 18 was all about Rock vs. Hogan. In fact, that is pretty much all anyone remembers about it these days. Even the main event (Triple H vs. Chris Jericho) is largely forgotten. So being the opening match on that show was bound to mean you aren't remembered at all. Rob Van Dam and William Regal were the unfortunate duo, battling for the Intercontinental title. A great battle ensued and was a tremendous way to get the crowd fired up for the incredible reaction they would give Rock and Hogan later on.

Hogan/McMahon, Angle/Lesnar,Michaels/Jericho: **Wrestlemania 19** was full of memorable matches, and a few less-memorable ones. Like the tag title match for example. With Charlie Haas & Shelton Benjamin, Los Guerreros and Chris Benoit & Rhyno bringing their tremendous Smackdown rivalries to the big stage, this was another fine Smackdown tag match.

There have been some memorable Wrestlemania debuts. From Austin to the Undertaker, Rock to Eddie Guerrero, everyone has had their first Wrestlemania moment. At **Wrestlemania 20**, it was the turn of John Cena to walk onto the big stage. Cena and Big Show had a fine match for the US title, culminating in Cena delivering an FU/Attitude Adjustment on the giant not once, but twice. A good start for a man who is now seen as 'the man' in WWE these days.

Wrestlemania 21 had another memorable opener the next year. Fans had seen the classic Eddie Guerrero/Rey Mysterio match from WCW's Halloween Havoc on Mysterio's DVD, and the WWE was keen to have them recreate the magic on the Wrestlemania stage. Sadly, the two weren't able to reach the level of previous battles, in part due to problems with Rey Mysterio's mask, but this is still a nice little match to open the show, despite being a disappointment to those involved.

Sometimes you look at the participants in a match and think it will be terrible. Such was the case with Kane and the Big Show v Carlito and Chris Masters at **Wrestlemania 22**. Not the greatest collection of performers, but they all had their working shoes on, and this lead to a half-decent little opening bout here. Not the greatest ever, but still way better than it had any rights to be on paper.

With Undertaker vs. Batista, Michaels vs. Cena and the Vince vs. Donald Trump bout dominating **Wrestlemania 23**, the US title between Chris Benoit and MVP kind of got buried amidst the undercard. But these two contested a tremendous bout that would be far better remembered had Benoit not sullied his reputation forever shortly after. That year should have been one to remember Benoit as a great performer. Sadly, it will be a year he is forever remembered for what he did outside the ring.

Wrestlemania 24 opened with a great little street fight featuring JBL and Finlay. Two men who won't hold back in delivering beatings did just that here, and the result was a fun brawl. Enjoyable perhaps for everyone who wasn't Finlay or JBL-they must have been really sore afterwards.

Wrestlemania 25 pitted Matt Hardy and Jeff Hardy. Both Hardys were kind of on

the downturn as far as their in ring performances were going, but this was definitely a good outing from them. They went all out to prove their detractors wrong and produced a solid extreme rules match. Maybe this is better remembered than most of the other 'hidden gems', but in the context of a show that had the first Shawn Michaels vs. Undertaker match this is always going to be one of the lesser remembered decent Mania matches of the modern era.

Last year's Mania produced some more classics, with the HBK/Undertaker rematch topping the bill. It's actually difficult to say less than twelve months later what won't be remembered as the 'hidden gem'. Possibly it will be Rey Mysterio v CM Punk?

So with all those hidden gems, we approach this year's Wrestlemania. It's certainly a Wrestlemania with more potential 'hidden gems' than major league 'must see' matches. There'll be surprises and some classic moments. And again, this may be a Mania where some of the unexpected matches deliver beyond what we expect.

So watch the show, enjoy the big matches, but spare a thought for those undercard guys trying their hardest to deliver their very own 'hidden gem' Mania moment.

■ **Contact Phil at PhilUK1@aol.com**

See page 104 for our shared Wrestlemania experiences...

4 copies of WWE's latest game up for grabs!

WWE All-stars is an arcade style wrestling game that pits current superstar wrestlers from the WWE and legends from earlier eras together in the same game. Classic wrestlers like Andre the Giant, Jimmy Snuka, the Ultimate Warrior and many more face off against current superstars like John Cena, Triple H, Randy Orton and Undertaker in battles designed to determine who is actually the best of all time in the "squared circle."

The Wrestling Press, in association with THQ, has four copies of WWE All-stars to give away to four lucky **TWP** readers! To be in for a shot of winning this great prize simply answer the following question :

Who did Hulk Hogan defeat at WrestleMania III?

Send your answer to dtwooduk@hotmail.com
Please include your postal address and preferred console (Xbox or Playstation)
Competition closes 25th April. Winners will be revealed in issue 14.

PLEASE NOTE ONLY PAL (UK) REGIONS ARE AVAILABLE

In another fantastic competition **The Wrestling Press** has four bottles of JR's famous bar-b-q sauce to give away. To get your hands on some finger licking goodness answer this simple question:

What year did Jim Ross debut in WWF?

Send your answer to dtwooduk@hotmail.com
Please include your postal address. Competition closes 25th April.

A Royal Oversight?

WHY THE WWE NEEDS TO RELEASE A JERRY LAWLER DVD?

| Words **JOHN MILNER** |

Over the years, many fans, rivals and media outlets have created an image of Vince McMahon as an evil, cash-thirsty madman, intent on taking over the wrestling industry. And over the years, Vince has pressed many a wrestling rival out of business, or taken advantage of their missteps to swoop in and conquer their territory, sign away their talent and, in the end, grabbed up one of their most important assets: their tape libraries.

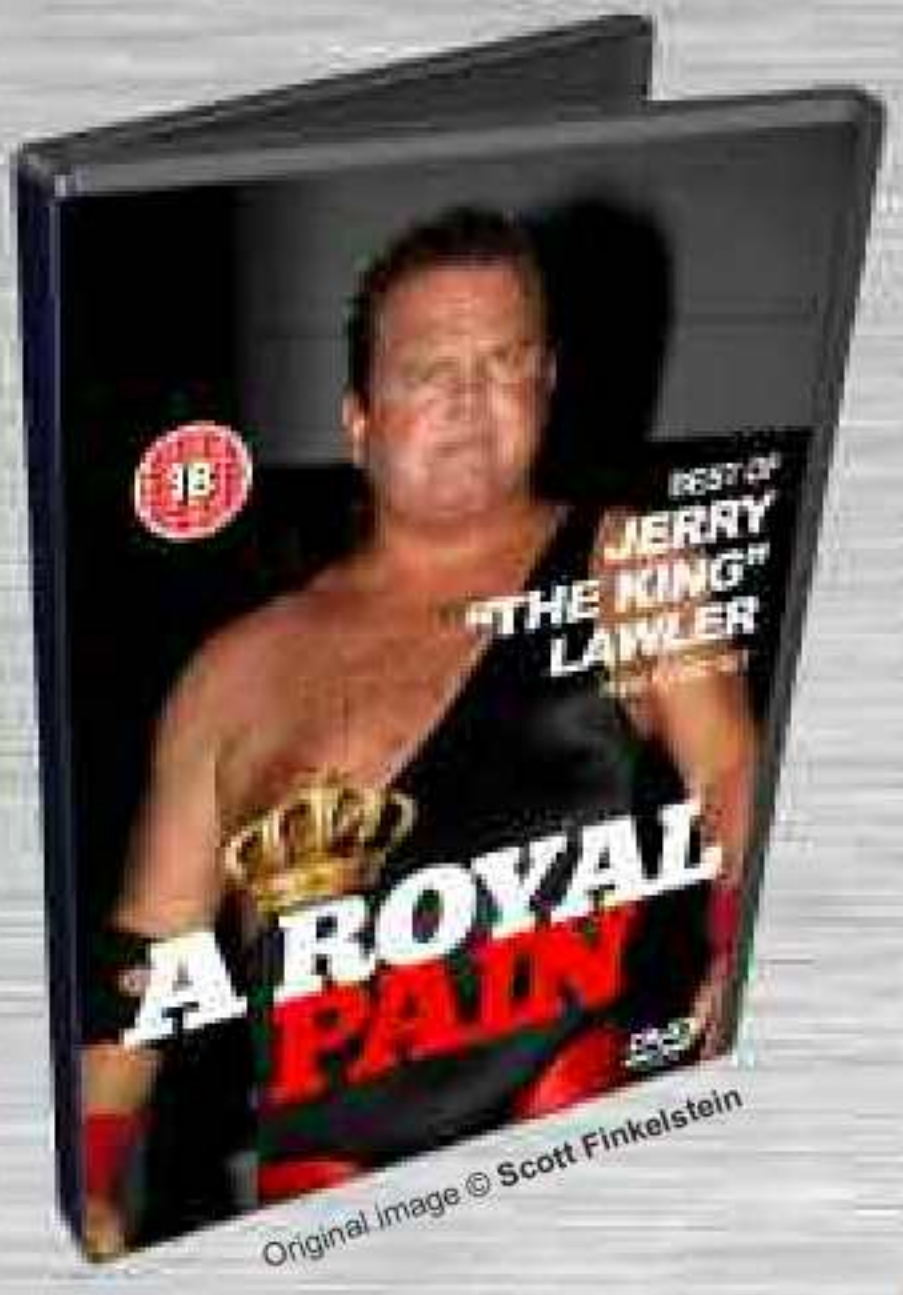
If McMahon was the evil genius that many have painted him as throughout the years, he would have locked all of those tapes up in a vault at Titan Towers, so that no wrestling fan could ever watch them again.

THEY MAY BE MISSING THE BOAT ON ONE DVD DEVOTED TO ONE PARTICULAR LEGEND....

But McMahon knew the resources he now had at his disposal, and, I'm sure, just how he could reap the benefits of those resources. But unlike most schemes where billionaires like McMahon decide to charge for what they have access to, the customer (that would be wrestling fans like you and me) also reap the rewards.

Today, wrestling fans have the ability (for a price, of course) to gain access to a veritable wrestling history lesson through WWE's OnDemand services, both through cable TV and the Internet.

And then, let's not forget the WWE's DVD collection. In recent years, fans have been able to purchase DVDs devoted to such subjects as Verne Gagne's AWA and Fritz Von Erich's World Class Championship Wrestling and "the Best of Starrcade" from Jim Crockett Promotions and the Rise and Fall of WCW and the Rise and Fall of ECW, to name just a few.



Original image © Scott Finkelstein

Lawler in action outside of WWE, striking a hapless Nick Gage.
© **Scott Finkelstein**

And it's not just now-defunct promotions that are getting the DVD retrospective treatment. Not only does the WWE produce DVDs focusing on current roster stars such as Edge, John Cena and, most recently, the Big Show, but they also have introduced its younger fanbase to stars from the past including Ricky Steamboat, Curt Hennig, the Hart Family and Bobby "the Brain" Heenan. **(For us older fans, these DVDs take us back to the heydays of wrestling from our own younger years.)**

But while the WWE should be lauded for putting the extensive video resources it has to good use, they may be missing the boat on one particular DVD devoted to one particular legend, and a legend that still sits directly in their midst.

Jerry "the King" Lawler has been in the WWE for 19 years. Some fans may recall his early (but lengthy) feud with Bret "the Hitman" Hart, more remember him for his lust-filled cries of "Puppies", his years spent behind the microphone on commentary, and, of course, he's made headlines lately for feuding with WWE Champion, the Miz.

IN LAWLER'S CASE, HIS BEST IN-RING YEARS CAME BEFORE MANY MODERN FANS WERE BORN....

However, those fans who only know Lawler from what they see on Raw every week can not begin to appreciate the career that the King has had, and what he brings to the ring in terms of experience.

If anything, putting together a match list of Lawler's 40-year-career, and limiting it to even a three-disc set could be difficult.

Certainly there'd be the obvious: his feud with comedian Andy Kaufman, his AWA title victory over Curt Hennig, his WWE feuds with Bret Hart and, now, the Miz.

And, of course, one would have to include almost a disc's worth of matches from Memphis, where Lawler took on everyone from Terry Funk to Hulk Hogan to Jeff Jarrett, and battled visiting champions including Ric Flair, Nick Bockwinkle and Harley Race.

And no DVD about Lawler in Memphis would be complete without the 1987 steel cage match between Lawler and Austin Idol, which included an attack by Tommy Rich and Paul E. Dangerously (aka Paul Heyman) in which the fans rioted, many trying to storm the cage. Just as no DVD would be complete without Lawler's 1990 feud with Eddie Gilbert, which saw Gilbert run down Lawler in the parking lot.

And discussing Lawler's reign as AWA Champion would lead very nicely into his title vs. title program with then-WCCW Champion Kerry Von Erich, which led to one of the most unique (if more than a little controversial) pay-per-view shows in history Super Clash III in December 1988. With

stars from the AWA, WCCW, Memphis and POWW, the show was headlined by a very bloody bout which saw Lawler defeat Von Erich via a referee stoppage.

And so, even with one disc for Lawler's WWE career (Bret, Miz, Jake Roberts, with the Kaufman feud added in), one disc for Memphis and one disc for his reign as AWA/WCCW Champion, is there still room for Lawler's 1995 stint in Smoky Mountain Wrestling, or his 1997 "invasion" of ECW, that saw him team with Sabu and Rob Van Dam against Tommy Dreamer and others?

And for every name I've listed above, there's probably two or three that others could suggest.

> **But no matter what the final match listing would be, the arguments for those matches not included are, in fact, arguments that support the fact that the WWE is missing the boat in not producing a Jerry "the King" Lawler retrospective DVD.**

Even if Lawler was still shouting about "Puppies", a WWE DVD could still reinforce that character with a montage of Lawler's lewd comments and video of his hosting bikini contests, etc. (Remember his reaction to Sable's painted on bikini?!?!?) However, in recent years, it seems as if Lawler has "matured" somewhat. He's no longer really a heel commentator and seems even more serious and realistic than his broadcast partner, Michael Cole.

Although Lawler may have limited his in-ring competition, he still manages to step out from behind the microphone a few times a year (most recently he battled no less than a WWE Champion in the Miz). But, as even Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan are finding out, there's a large portion of the wrestling fan who don't particularly want to see a 60-plus year old man climb into the ring. In the case of both Hogan and Flair, their in-ring histories have been massively chronicled and, depending on who you talk to about whom, massively respected.

In Lawler's case, his best in-ring years came before many modern fans were born, and came in a territory that wasn't readily seen by many fans, even in the 80s. So, unless someone lived in Memphis or has a collection of issues of Pro Wrestling Illustrated, they probably aren't aware of Lawler's career. And so, when Lawler steps into the ring on a Monday Night Raw in 2011, there will always been fans may cheer him because he's a face and they see him every week battle verbally with Michael Cole and other visiting heels, while lauding John Cena, John Morrison and others. But many others will wonder (often aloud, and on message boards) just what business this old man has in the ring.

© Scott Finkelstein

Those detractors might not be so quick to shake their heads at a Lawler-Miz feud if they knew this was a former AWA Champion stepping into the ring, if they had knowledge of Lawler's feud against Tommy Rich and Austin Idol, if they saw him battle a bloody Kerry Von Erich at "Super Clash III".

A Jerry "The King" Lawler Retrospective DVD would not only put some extra coin in Vince's pocketbook, would not only let long-time fans relive some of the King's great moments, would not only introduce new fans to those great moments, but it might even help the modern-day product.

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JERRY LAWLER bio

By JOHN M. MILNER

While Lawler's voice is heard every Monday night on Raw, it was that very voice, and his job as a Memphis disc jockey that paved the way for his entry into the squared circle. He made a deal with a local wrestling promoter, Aubrey Griffith, where Lawler would provide free publicity for Griffith in exchange for being trained.

Lawler would receive much of his training from the legendary Jackie Fargo. Ironically, Lawler, who debuted in 1970, would feud with Fargo over the Southern Heavyweight Championship in the mid-70s. (Lawler would hold either the NWA or AWA Southern title almost 70 times in his career.)

Initially a heel and managed by Sam Bass, Lawler would turn face after a split with Bass at the end of 1974. By then, he was known as "the King" Jerry Lawler.

In 1980, with several title reigns to his credit, Lawler had to put his career on hold due to a broken leg. However, he would return to the ring and soon found himself in one of the biggest angles of his career. In 1982, Lawler took exception to comedian Andy Kaufman's skits where he wrestled women as the Intergender Heavyweight Champion.

On April 5th, Lawler challenged Kaufman to a match. After two piledrivers, Kaufman was sent to the hospital with an injured neck. On July 29th, Lawler and Kaufman would have another altercation on Late Night With David Letterman, where Kaufman threw coffee in the King's face after Lawler slapped him. (The feud, and the true story behind it, were later immortalized on film in the Kaufman biopic Man on the Moon.)

While Lawler would spend much of his career in the 80s in Memphis, winning title after title

© Scott Finkelstein

LAWLER WOULD BECOME ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR ATHLETES IN MEMPHIS' HISTORY....

(the AWA International Championship, Mid-America Championship, AWA International Championship), he would also travel to Japan (winning the Polynesian Pacific Championship in 1985). He would also challenge visiting NWA and AWA World Championships when they came through Memphis.

Lawler would become one of the most popular, if not the most popular athlete in Memphis' history. In 1999, he ran for Mayor, finishing 3rd with 11.7% of the votes. Ten years later, he ran again, and finished 5th.

In 1987, the right to face AWA World Champion Nick Bockwinkle caused Lawler to feud with Austin Idol, Tommy Rich and Paul E. Dangerously. During one steel cage match against Idol, the King was attacked and hospitalized by Rich and Dangerously, who had been hiding under the ring. The fans rioted, some even tried to climb into the cage, and it took several hours for police to clear the arena, so the participants could leave.

Lawler would finally win the AWA Championship, defeating Curt Hennig in May 1988. As AWA Champion, Lawler would enter into a cross-promotional feud with World Class Championship Wrestling Heavyweight Champion Kerry Von Erich that culminated in the Super Clash III pay-per-view in December of that year.

Issues with Verne Gagne led to Lawler leaving the AWA and being stripped of the World title, but the King would continue to wrestle in Memphis as part of the United States Wrestling Association. He would team with Jeff Jarrett against the Moondogs over the USWA Tag Team titles.

Lawler was involved in another cross-promotional program in the early 1990s, this time with the WWE. After announcing he would be in attendance at a WWE show in 1992, Lawler jumped the barricade during a Bret Hart match. Although nothing happened between the two, Hart and Lawler would feud in the WWE, beginning in 1993.

For much of the early – to – mid-90s, Lawler worked in the WWE (as a heel commentator and sometime wrestler) and in Memphis (as a face), as part of a cross-over promotion that included Randy Savage, Bret and Owen Hart and even Vince McMahon.

While his biggest feud in the WWE was with Bret Hart (started after Lawler attacked Hart after the 1993 King of the Ring, declaring himself the only true King in the WWE), he would also feud with Roddy Piper, Jake Roberts, the Ultimate Warrior and Doink the Clown.

In 1994-1995, Lawler also traveled to Smoky Mountain Wrestling, capturing the SMW title from Tony Anthony in January 1995. In 1997, Lawler was involved in another cross-promotion, this time with ECW. After criticizing ECW on WWE TV, Lawler appeared at the ECW event Wrestlepalooza '97, attacking Tommy Dreamer. Dreamer would later defeat Lawler at ECW's Hardcore Heaven event.

During the latter part of the 90s, Lawler would remain behind the mic on Raw, although he would occasionally step into the ring (including against Tazz).

> **In February 2001, Lawler's then-wife, Stacy "the Kat" Carter (they married in September 2000) was released from WWE and Lawler quit out of protest. Lawler would make appearances on the independent circuit before returning to the WWE in November. (Lawler and Carter separated in the summer, with the divorce becoming finalized in October 2003.)**

Back teaming with Jim Ross on Raw, the King would, on several occasions find himself stepping into the ring in defense of his broadcast partner. Lawler teamed with Ross against Al Snow and Jonathan Coachman in 2003 and faced against Tazz again in 2008. Lawler would also face Booker T, Randy Orton, Chris Jericho and others in the ring.

In November 2010, Lawler began his feud with the Miz. He would receive a title shot in a TLC Match on Raw, only to lose due to interference from his broadcast partner, Michael Cole. Lawler would, over the next few months, find himself facing the Miz in various matches, including several tag bouts.

In January 2011, Lawler won a 7-man Raw Rumble, earning the right to challenge the Miz for the WWE Championship at the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view. While Lawler lost the match, he will still be headed to Wrestlemania to face Cole.

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TRIPLE H vs THE UNDERTAKER

TEN YEARS ON

Words **ANDY SHARP**

Wrestlemania X-Seven was perhaps one of the greatest Wrestlemania events of all time, with some great contests included. One of the great encounters included was the great semi-main event which pitted the Cerebral Assassin Triple H vs The American Bad Ass version of the legendary Undertaker. While watching this battle, it was pretty obvious that this could have easily been the main event on the card, fans ate up the match as the action spilled all over the arena eventually resulting with Undertaker pinning Triple H.

Ten years later we find ourselves in a WWE Universe where Shawn Michaels has returned to the ring and since retired, the WWF Attitude era is long gone, Stone Cold and The Rock have now retired as in ring performers and now the end looks like it's on the horizon for another two of the greatest superstars of all time.

Wrestlemania has more to live up to year after year, and it seems these days that main event title matches at Wrestlemania just don't cut it anymore. Management are always looking for the bigger pay off and as a result it seems the Royal Rumble winner and subsequently the main event World Title match at Wrestlemania has taken a backseat over the years.

© David Seto

Sad but true, and even when the World Championship matches are given the last spot on the card it seems most likely that fans will be exhausted after seeing a match that is calibre for match of the year. Will WWE take the risk and give us Alberto Del Rio vs Edge last? Or are they going to play the safe card and leave fans waiting until the very end for what promises (and is promoted) to be the biggest match of the night.

Ten years on from their epic battle at Wrestlemania X-7 we have a very different Triple H and Undertaker. The streak will of course be on the line as Triple H tries to defeat 'The last Outlaw.' You may have noticed that

Main picture © John Smolek

WWE have yet to mention their previous encounter ten years ago – At least on TV that is.

This is the classic WWE mind-set, the reason for this is said to be because they don't want to hurt the perception that Triple H is a worthy contender to end the streak. This is ridiculous, what better way to add more to the match? Logically it would only increase The Game's desire to put down The Deadman.

Also, how could you possibly ruin the perception of Triple H being a worthy contender at this juncture in his career? It wouldn't make a damn bit of difference. Triple H doesn't need facts from the past to be hidden from newer fans. Surely they will get the message, when he buries Sheamus upon his return, proceeds to grab a mic and tell everyone that the only challenge he has left is to break Undertaker's streak.

The question has to be asked, who has the most to gain from a win in this contest?

PREDICTING THE OUTCOME OF THIS MATCH IS GOING TO BE A DIFFICULT DECISION

From a logical standpoint it's safe to say that both men don't have many years left in them. It's also logical to say that if the streak is to ever end it should go to a guy who has at least another ten years ahead of him. A victory of that calibre would guarantee a main event spot for their entire career and a feat that could very well carry that particular talent into the hall of fame.

If The Undertaker comes out victorious then he's only one step closer to reaching 20-0 at Wrestlemania. Reaching 20 should signal the end of his career and he can disappear into the dark side forever. But by doing this would WWE have wasted a golden opportunity by not creating one of the most shocking defeats in wrestling history?

© David Seto

It's hard to judge.

Predicting what the outcome of this match will be is going to be a difficult decision, but the simplest answer is sometimes the best answer – Undertaker will win. But let's access the situation. It's certainly still of dream match calibre, even though Undertaker still can't be 100% after rehabbing from his rotator cuff and Triple H, has also only just returned from injury.

The fact that they've made this a no holds barred match shows that they can rely on other factors in the match rather than solely on their in-ring work. The stipulation also brings up some speculation as to whether or not the match will actually have a clean finish.

If Triple H is to lose, he's going to 'die trying' thus will want to look good no matter the result, The Undertaker by the same token has so much more to

lose with the streak - a clean victory just might not be on the cards. Of course, this is all just speculation and I hope it keeps to the two men in the ring, as it should be.

Even though this is officially the second time we've seen these two compete against each other on the grand stage, it would be unfair to access this match compared to their first meeting at Wrestlemania because so much time has passed since then.

While many see this match as a sequel, I don't.

Shawn Michaels vs. The Undertaker at Wrestlemania 26 was a sequel as it obviously happened two years in a row. Triple H vs The Undertaker is more like a re-make of the original movie. This time around there's a whole lot more pressure to deliver the goods and since both men have aged ten years and are fresh off the injury list – this will prove to be a difficult task.

> **The after-math of this match is going to be tough, with both men verbally admitting time and time again in recent weeks that the only challenge they have left is each other, then what's next after mania?**

Could there be a rematch at a future event or maybe even Triple H vs The Undertaker again at Wrestlemania 28 – Only next time round both men's careers could be on the line. Who knows?

Despite the impressive undefeated streak at Wrestlemania The Undertaker has fought Kane twice, Shawn Michaels twice and this will be the second time against Triple H. If he wins, that's 6 out of those 19 victories that were against the same people.

Even though Triple H is already on the long list of victims when you think about it winning simply isn't a logical step for The Game. There are not many fans out there that will say they want the streak to end. Nothing seems to remain 100% intact in the sports entertainment world: People come out of retirement several times, Titles disappear and Legacies are tarnished by personal lives, so perhaps the streak is the only thing that should stay.

It's the one thing that can remain solid and true in the annals of time and can be talked about for generations to come.

These two icons are the last remnants of the beloved Attitude Era. Not only will older fans be tuning in to Wrestlemania to see their old favourites like The Rock and Stone Cold, but they will also be treated to what can potentially be one of the greatest Wrestlemania matches ever – If done right.

For new fans and old alike The Undertaker and Triple H have a lot of emotion attached to them. These are characters that fans really care about, but nothing can last forever.

Its matches like this on stages like Wrestlemania that these two tremendous athletes are still around for, which begs the question – over the course of the next year, will it be time to end the game and rest in peace?

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Every month the Wrestling Priest rewards individuals deserving of particular praise. These wrestling blessings can be for actions in the ring or out of it, in front of a camera or backstage.

In previous issues, the blessings have primarily gone to younger competitors. This issue, the blessing goes to someone at the end of their career....

The Undertaker

Most likely, this Wrestlemania could be Undertaker's last. Injuries and the general wear and tear of wrestling for over two decades, have taken their toll and Taker, no longer a young man, is bound to hang up the boots very soon.

So it is appropriate then that we at **The Wrestling Press** give credit to the Dead Man. This is a man who has been a locker room general, a genuine wrestling star throughout periods that lacked real stars, and a man who worked hard to create a persona around a gimmick that really had no right to exist more than a few months.

Originally a fairly effective midcarder in WCW (and before that in Memphis and elsewhere), Mark Callaway entered the WWF to some fanfare. The 'mystery partner' gimmick is a difficult one to get right, and is usually reserved for the introduction of a bonafide star, but as an unknown in the WWF, Callaway fitted the Undertaker gimmick to a tee, and his presence

was overwhelming from the start. Fans literally couldn't take their eyes off of him.

As with the Berzerker, Papa Shango, Repo Man or Saba Simba, the Undertaker was an outlandish gimmick that really should have been as buried as it suggested shortly after. The ridiculous nature of it (a dead man who wrestles?) guaranteed it wouldn't get over.

Yet so intimidating was the Undertaker, and so good at working in the gimmick was Callaway, that fans did get into it. Even with years and years of terrible opponents, such as the Berzerker or Giant Gonzales, the Undertaker managed to still be someone the fans just wanted to see.

Inevitably, the Undertaker turned babyface. His popularity rose and continued to rise as he battled more and more credible opponents and, as years went on, he began to amass an as-yet-unmentioned winning streak at Wrestlemania.

But then the WWF began to change. Out went the cartoonish nature of 1995, in came the Attitude era of late 1997. And as the WWF began to morph into different styles, the Undertaker character morphed as well.

In order to keep the character fresh, Undertaker went from being a slow, plodding 'dead man' to a cult leader of the Ministry of Darkness, to an 'American Badass' on a motorcycle, to an MMA influenced fighter. And with every change to his character, Callaway showed he could adapt to different styles.

And so the Undertaker outlasted practically everyone else on the roster. Bret Hart left. Steve Austin left. The Rock left. Shawn Michaels left. But the Undertaker carried on. And more than that, the Undertaker stayed very much at the top of the WWF.

All photos © David Seto

The genuine awe and presence that Undertaker still brings is a great testament to the staying power of Callaway and the character he has carefully protected for so long. Unlike many other wrestlers who go on chat shows and act all goofy, or appear at celebrity events and get all starstruck at the 'real stars' in attendance, Undertaker is stoic and reserved wherever he is seen. He doesn't live the gimmick, but he equally does not appear in any situation that destroys the gimmick, and that has lead to him being the legend that he has become today.

Undertaker, Mark Callaway, we salute you. You've been at the top of your game for decades without fail, and you've been a superstar when superstars were sadly lacking. We don't yet know if this will be your final Wrestlemania, but regardless we feel you have earned this issue's wrestling blessings.

Words **MARTYN LICCHELLI**
Photos **TONY KNOX**

SPOILING IMPACT?

All over the internet, I've seen dozens of threads in message boards created by those who slander the TNA product, talking about how poor shows have been from the reports they have read instead of actually watching the shows. Over two weeks, I decided to conduct an experiment, to find out just how much a spoiler report on the internet can affect my perception of a show compared to actually viewing the event. To conduct this, I would write down my feelings on key points after reading spoilers. I then watched the show when it aired and compared the thoughts from the reports to those during my viewing of the show.

I started with the TNA Impact show that aired in America on the 3rd of February. The show opened with a promo, in which they openly acknowledged Kevin Nash and Booker T going to WWE. I'd got three lines in to a spoiler report and already hated the show. Why even bring this up?

There'd be no mention from WWE that either were in TNA; for TNA there was no need to bring WWE up at all.

The rest of the spoilers didn't read too bad. A women's boxing match with

© Tony Knox

Sarita and Mickie James did sound quite terrible, the spoilers even listed it as pretty bad.

The end of the show, however, just sounded incredibly bad. Maybe it was because I'd hoped for a Main Event Mafia faction return. Maybe it was because I hoped TNA would spring a new surprise. But to read in the spoilers that 'THEY' were in fact Fortune really had me writing this show off. Afterwards I thought about this for a while, and thought the angle had plenty of chance for success.

The idea of the originals running out the invading 'big names' that were killing their company, TNA had tried before, but maybe now it could succeed. But the tone of the spoilers, coupled with the booking decisions leading into the big reveal, completely contradicts that Fortune were ever meant to be the choice for 'THEY' had me one hundred per cent ready to write off the show as the biggest let down of the year.

> **When Tuesday rolled around I prepared for what I expected to be a pretty terrible show, capped off with an angle that failed before and now was pointlessly restarting.**

While watching, I still found the opening promo rather turgid. I really didn't see much need to mention Nash going to WWE, but with Scott Steiner in the ring it came across as more of a comment at him not having his former running buddies than them referencing a dead in the water angle.

I really enjoyed the build up with Jeff Hardy and Ken Anderson. The mutual respect and making sure everything was clean is an odd way to go when it's in a heated feud, but I thought they did a good job of it. I'm pretty indifferent to both, so to actually get me fairly interested in their match, despite already knowing the outcome, is an achievement.

The rest of the show was just average, which for the most part is TV that is watchable, but not exactly enjoyable. That is until the main angle to close the show. I hated this angle when I read the spoilers, despite hoping it could work out. I'd read web pages and forum threads about how bad this was. I watched it I was drawn in. A.J. Styles cut pretty much the best promo of his life. The crowd were in to it, and I really felt like it made sense.

This to me gives TNAs younger stars, and original stars a great chance to shine. The young guys can stand tall, defend TNA, and be the ones to take out the big stars and hopefully get the rub that these names were brought in to give. With the chance of this happening, and being caught in A.J.'s promo I was even willing to forgive continuity errors and hope that it would be patched up next week. It's not perfect. But with various thoughts running through my mind when the show ended, I was excited about TNA for the first time in a long while.

The next show was 10th of February, spoilers made me question whether or not TNA had actually bothered to write a storyline to go with their new version of who 'THEY' were. After A.J.'s big speech at the end of the last show, I was expecting a full development of the angle explaining why Fortune left; maybe bring Ric Flair in to it. Instead, we were to have Eric Bischoff and Jeff Jarrett run them down whilst they argued what they did for the company. It sounded pretty weak.

Elsewhere; Hernandez joined Immortal, which I was all for. Some guy dressed like Kato from Green Hornet continued to be pointless, and Brother Devon continued to regret the TNA bring your children to work scheme. Mickie James and Madison Rayne continued their

feud which is clearly meant to be the foundation for the women's division revival, but just isn't working despite good work from both ladies.

Matt Morgan lost a title match against Anderson, which Hardy watched from on top of a ladder. No reason was given for this, and Kurt Angle was given Robert Roodes place in the main event as he teamed with A.J.Styles to take on Jarrett and Hardy. Not the best way to push the young guys. The show ended with a brawl where the two biggest heroes for the face team being Rob Van Dam, who managed to clear house for a bit on his own, and Mr Anderson who was the only man left standing at the close. Again, why not push the younger guys here? We also had Angle sign a contract that put his kids on the line; sigh.

© Tony Knox

As Tuesday rolled around, I again sat down ready to watch a show that I felt would disappoint me. This time, it did, more so than the spoilers. The opening promo I felt completely failed to capitalise on any of the build coming out of the previous episode, with no real explanation for them working alongside Immortal. Devon and Brothers Ray's feud continued to use Devon's kids as a means of getting heat, when in actuality Ray being a coward was doing enough to make him seem like a prick. Bringing family in to it seemed pointless.

> **The title match really annoyed me. Not because of the poor quality, but because this was a world title match, and what did commentary choose to put over repeatedly? That the winner would get a ladder match, for the title at Against All Odds. When a contest with Jeff is being promoted as more prize worthy than a match for the title, I totally lost interest.**

The wedding and children stipulations were pathetic in writing, and no less so in spoken word.The finale with Anderson standing tall left me baffled as to how they could end the previous week with Fortune looking good thanks to a promo, but this week left them looking like the bench team to not only Anderson, but also RVD who'd done a far better job of seeing off Immortal than anyone else. Disappointment could only begin to describe 10th February show.

So over the course of my two week experiment I did manage to reach a conclusion. Spoiler reports do ruin the surprise of wrestling; they are also a great way to keep up with key results. They are, however, not an accurate measure as to the quality of a TV show.

No matter how good, or bad something may seem on paper, when it's on your screen there are a lot of extra factors to take in to account that can completely change your perception as it takes place. It's a shame, because despite me being disappointed when watching the second episode of TNA, I know a lot of people skipped the first one because they'd not gotten the Mafia back, and Fortune being 'THEY' sounded weak.

They hadn't seen it. They had read about it, and I truly believe if some of the people got out of this mentality, judging TNA based off the writes ups, they'd actually find that it's not as bad as those reports so often make out, intentionally or otherwise.

Contact Martyn at Martyn@psychoduck.co.uk

Words

JAMIE KENNEDY

Photos

TONY KNOX

TNA

"STORM THE GATE"

"I think if a fan is going to travel to see us, they should get in free to see the show."

TNA Owner Dixie Carter-Salinas, Youshoot: Live interview which took place May 2010.

When Dixie Carter was appointed president of TNA Wrestling in the spring of 2003, she was clearly an extremely optimistic woman regarding her chances of success in an industry which had been dominated by one company (World Wrestling Entertainment) for the previous few years, having bought out its own competitors in World Championship Wrestling and Extreme Championship Wrestling.

The thought of muscling in and eventually sharing the obvious finances gained by operating in the professional wrestling and entertainment markets must have seemed incredibly appealing, especially to a person with the business mind that Carter has.

It's common knowledge amongst those who follow sports entertainment, even on a casual basis; TNA wrestling do not charge for entry to events taking place at the "iMPACT! Zone" (Soundstage 21, in Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida), their home base for events since 2004.

This matter has been long debated, both by fans and critics – with neither side reaching a firm conclusion as to just how beneficial or negative an impact (excuse the pun) this is to the company and their trading's as a pro wrestling group. The cold hard facts state, however, that TNA receive literally zero money for each show they hold at the venue. The live gate comes in at a total of $0, this is perhaps shocking to comprehend, considering how much money is expended per event.

Being completely fair to TNA, there are restrictions placed on their deal with Universal Studios for use of the sound stage for tapings and live events, namely; the company are simply *not allowed* to charge any money for tickets to shows emanating from the arena.

© Tony Knox

This obviously has its drawbacks, disallowing TNA from making a profit at their own shows, most of which are run from Universal Studios. The sound stage is part of a park set-up, in which visitors are charged an entrance fee at the gates and are therefore not to pay for any single park attraction afterwards.

The company has toyed with the idea of expanding to holding more than the handful of shows it runs per year outside the iMPACT! Zone. This has been tempered with low crowds to live events throughout the company's home country, the United States, and a failure to put a good projection of the product onto television. spite of this, the company recently drew approximately 8,000 paid fans to a taping in Fayetteville, North Carolina – showing proof that there is potential for expansion should the promotion decide to take their product on the road.

Wrestling fans seemingly are not interested in paying money to attend a TNA show en masse, realising that they are not required to do so should they be fortunate enough to live local to Orlando, Florida. In the eyes of many, the promotion does not hold the same draw as WWE in regards to seeing the product live and in living colour.

This poses a problem to TNA and highlights a fatal flaw and irony in Carter's logic. Why should fans attending house show live events "on the road" have to pay, when those fans attending TV tapings and Pay-Per-View broadcasts at the iMPACT! Zone do not pay a penny? The argument of fans travelling to the show and therefore not being charged is null and void, considering that every single person attending – whether it be at Universal Studios or not – has travelled in some form or another to be there.

Indeed Pay-Per-View is another entire business model of which the company fail to take advantage of. Buy rate numbers for TNA PPV events reportedly come in around the 10,000-20,000 mark each month, with numbers fluctuating depending on the stature of the event.

Footage courtesy of Kayfabe Commentaries, www.kayfabecommentaries.com

Dixie Carter has undermined the importance of the entire concept by stating in an interview with You:Shoot Live in May 2010. *"Pay-Per-View is a dying model, but one I happened to make many millions of dollars on. Until I can replace that income, I'll continue to do it. It's not where I'd put my sole focus on".*

How on earth Pay-Per-View can be seen as a dying model when brands such as UFC continue to pull huge numbers really needs to be clarified. Perhaps what would have been a more accurate statement would be to say that TNA do not offer fans a good enough level of entertainment during their pay-to-view events in order to keep them coming back each month.

There is clearly a fan base for the company, with over 1 million viewers each week for flagship show, "iMPACT!" on Spike TV, but a significantly small portion of these regular viewers decide to tune into TNA PPV's on a regular basis.

© Tony Knox

These reasons could be sufficient when arguing of TNA's hunger to promote a Pay-Per-View spectacular in the United Kingdom within the next few years. The company may fall behind its main competitor in America, but in Britain it could be viewed as being an entirely different story.

TV ratings are competitive with WWE in this country and the promotion draws a similar frenzied response in the live setting, with almost its entire roster treated like superstars by the capacity crowds. These large and passionate audiences would come across well on TV, showing TNA in a very good light. It could even be argued that they'd come across comparable to WWE, which is something they obviously strive to appear.

Perhaps then, the only way to really achieve her goals of competition with Vince McMahon is for Carter to adopt a similar touring schedule as her main rival. With the aforementioned house at Fayetteville, NC of around 8,000 people paying to see the TNA product, and the weekly TV audience of over 1 million, it's clear that there is a place for more than one pro wrestling league in North America.

IGNORING THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE MONEY WOULD BE A FOOLISH MOVE BY DIXIE....

It would be great for the industry to see TNA strive to put on shows in the 'backyard' of the WWE, New York, and attempt to open themselves up to an entirely new audience with each passing night. Surely, the live gate in North Carolina must show Carter and TNA that there is life outside the walls of Soundstage 21.

> **Many have made the case that TNA's core audience at the iMPACT! Zone studios are jaded, somewhat worn out by years of the product and the company could really do with fresh eyes to see them on a nightly basis.**

Whether the group end up charging for admission or not, they simply cannot afford to let themselves grow stagnant. The endless possibilities of being seen by new eyes with each passing show are not something TNA can pass up. The potential is there, ignoring the opportunity to make money and grow her company would surely be a foolish move by the likeable, fan-friendly Dixie Carter. The professional wrestling industry, both workers and fans alike, want TNA to succeed.

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A CYNICAL MIND

with THE CYNIC

BROTHER, WHERE YOU BOUND?

Mattitude. What a soubriquet. No, that's "Tete de pissette", something very different. This means nickname. Your name is the first thing people find out about you, most of the time, even before they see you. When you hear about a Quentin, you're not expecting a hairy arsed builder are you? I'm usually grabbing my 2 by 4 and knuckledusters actually. Well, that class war won't fight itself. Your name is so important. And to saddle poor Matt with such a clunky, such a geeky title is to show how such little care.

Welcome to Matt's world. He's the Hardy we don't really want. The buy one get one free deal. Enjoy Jeff? Then get his beefier brother for half price! Hang on, where are you going? Come back!

There's just something lacking. He can wrestle, that's for sure, with great mat styling and some fairly high flying offence. Fairly. But that's not enough. Not when your brother is the razor's edge-walking, improbable height-defying, charismatic mess Jeff. Be honest, even when they were the card-hogging Hardy Boyz, setting PPV's alight with alarming regularity in ladder matches versus the awesomeness-reeking Edge and Christian, it's Jeff and E & C you remember, having their scrotes bifurcated and teeth removed by aluminum steps.

© Tony Knox

Matt was there, yeah, but he didn't hit the heights. Like the Hart Foundation, one flew, one remained a little more grounded, but The Anvil (and what a fine example of post-wrestling choices there) was a powerhouse, whilst Matt is...well, he does fly, but not quite enough to be a high flyer and he does bring the power but not quite enough to balance the team out. And so he comes off as a not-quite-as-good version of his brother.

Of course, this shouldn't matter in grappling. Look at the Blade Runners; Sting and Jim Hellwig, one a little tiny bit better than the other. Look at Hogan; not too long, it can cause torpor and listlessness. He isn't a great grappler, is he? Big boot, big leg, big bucks; he's challenged. But we love his character, don't we? And we pour money into that pouting bouche (I am nothing if not an internationalist) because he has a real charisma. Even Duggan has that.

Matt has Jeff. Constantly showing him how it's done. We may tut at the missed flights, the lacklustre performances, the mess. But really, he's got that Charlie Sheen syndrome; birds, booze, drugs, parties which don't affect his work pissiboluties? We have a sneaking regard for him, we want to know about the life he leads and what leads him to it; the tortured artist has always been an attraction, but our celeb culture and emotionalisation of the news ("the flood waters swept away your house and everything you'd worked 30 years for. How did you feel?" "Gutted.") means we love bad boy fuck ups.

But Matt isn't a bad boy. Even when we see the excellent early years footage of the bros in Omega, it's clear that Jeff was the innovator, flaky perhaps but exciting whilst Matt worked to make the fed a success; he did the nuts and bolts, but being the responsible ain't exciting is it? And neither is a booker/wrestler - Brian Pillman's disparaging "I respect you, booker man" shows that.

And it gets worse for Matt. We want wrestlers to be tough, hair trigger types, who would pummel pale, flabby men in bars if they so much as looked at them askance. Matt was happily together with tattooed one-trick pony Lita. He let Edge "look after" her whilst he travelled. Edge looked after one part of her more than another.

They became an item. Matt's ladylove stolen by the captain of chin, Edge. We would have loved it if he'd waffled him with a tyre iron in the car park. What did Matt do, the rough and tough Matt? Accepted it. He even sat by when Vincent turned it into a storyline, and not even one that made him look good, one that verified the lack of passion others perceived.

It might not have been that way. But perception is everything.

And although Matt has pinballed around the brands and picked up multiple titles, he did nothing with them and so wasn't allowed to run with them. How many of his title runs would be on our top 10 lists? Do I see one? No. Thought not.

He doesn't really help himself. I know we can't all be little Goldusts, but the all-black outfit means you need to go something. Even if it's as hackneyed as an extreme close-up and a scream of "I'm awesome!" Matt isn't good behind the stick so he needs to create a persona which is good to look at. We know grappling is an unholy amalgam of athleticism and acting.

Matt has all the quality of Martin Lawrence without the fat suit (although he's had moments when he seemed to be sporting one!); wrestlers have to inhabit the characters they are given, even if they hate them. Otherwise you get a Santana "Matador" situation. Matt simply looks uncomfortable. Not like this is beneath him, just like he doesn't believe he can do it - that's death for a wrestler.

WRESTLERS HAVE TO INHABIT THE CHARACTERS THEY ARE GIVEN, EVEN IN THEY HATE THEM

So why did he survive so long in WWE? Your guess is as good as mine. Actually, it isn't, it's much worse. So if I don't know, you have no chance. Allow me to posit some possibilities. His brother was a big draw and, as said before, it's a BOGOF situation. Or maybe Matt is just the meat and potatoes fighter you need to anchor a mid card or take the edge (Sorry about that word Matt) off the crowd excitement before a main event. Or maybe he was so unremarkable he just flew under the radar for years.

Well, he's certainly a blip now. His recent jump to TNA has seen him pitched in next to Easy E in the main angle, Hogan, Ditzie Carter and all.

And what was he doing in the last "Impact"? Trying to look tough, which amounted to hanging around at the back and pouting. Did any of us get scared? Did we hide behind the sofa? Again, this is Matt seemingly not believing in the work he's doing. He seems to have accepted that he will never really be a top string superstar, so he's just riding out his time until his body tells him he needs to quit.

And he might be in just the right place. TNA is the home of rogues and vagabonds with a slightly popular past. I would have thought that the financial crisis would have done for them, as the red ink keeps flowing, but they carry on making acquisitions, and continue to pay those who simply cannot perform (did you SEE Scott Steiner last week?) so perhaps Matt is in a comfy, undemanding bolthole to see out his career.

But you never know. Little brother could be sent down and then he'd have no support. He needs to take some responsibility for his own career; coasting won't help him now. He needs a new catchphrase - and "Matt Hardy v3" or "Mattitude 2011" don't count. He could do with some help in simply talking; for this, love him or hate him, he has the man who made it his forte, a man now called Immortal.

> **He could do with losing some weight perhaps, to help his ring performance. But that is all presuming he actually can muster up interest for a business which he's been in for so long. And he could change that "pony tail but no sideburns" abhorrence of a haircut too.**

He needs to look at what he's doing, otherwise it could be ROH, then independent weekend dates and then the shoot interview market. And he doesn't want that; does he?

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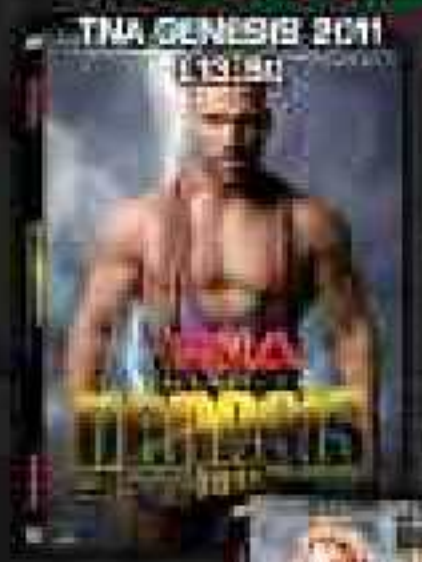

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Indie Events
Taking Place During
WrestleMania

Words ARI BERENSTEIN (ariberenstein@gmail.com)

A Look at The 2011 Independent Wrestlemania Weekend

WWE Wrestlemania 27 will emanate from the Georgia Dome on Sunday April 3rd, 2011, but it's far from the only wrestling promotion getting in on the act that weekend. There will be at least five independent shows that weekend, plus a leading name in the convention and autograph circuit and even a comedy show all taking place just a few miles away from the Dome. Indeed, Wrestlemania weekend has spun away from WWE and spawned into an annual tradition for the entire wrestling industry. Here is some of the action available to fans in the lead-up to The Big One:

Ring of Honor

Shows: "Ring of Honor Takes Center Stage"
When: April 1st & 2nd, 2011
Where: Center Stage Theatre
1374 W Peachtree St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30309
Bell Times: April 1st: 8 PM; April 2nd: 1 PM

SOLD OUT

http://www.rohwrestling.com
http://www.gofightlive.tv
http://www.centerstage-atlanta.com/about

ROH is back with its now traditional Wrestlemania weekend shows. They have run events in the same city as Wrestlemania for seven out of the past eight years and usually enjoy some of the larger crowds of their tour circuit. This time around, ROH runs in the comparably smaller Center Stage Theatre, though the building's rich ties to wrestling history (WCW used to hold television tapings there) certainly adds to the eventís character. Tickets for both shows have sold out, but fans can order internet Pay Per View from Go Fight Live for a special combination price of $19.99 for both shows (or $14.99 individually). In addition, ROH runs a meet & greet fan festival session on April 2nd from 10 AM-11:30 AM (open to all with a separate ticket purchase).

© Scott Finkelstein

Only a few matches have been announced for these shows as of press time (allowing for any fallout from their March 18th and 19th events in Plymouth, Virginia and New York City). However, each of the matches announced has significance. There is an **ROH World Title match between Roderick Str**ong or Eddie Edwards (whoever is champion) versus 'The Fallen Angel' Christopher Daniels and a ROH

World Tag Team Title match with The Kings of Wrestling (Chris Hero and Claudio Castagnoli) with manager Shane Hagadorn defending against Wrestlingís Greatest Tag Team of Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas.

The former, if its Strong versus Daniels, will be a rematch of Strongís first title defense as ROH Champion, while if Edwards wins the championship in New York on March 19th it will be a rematch of their recent Television Title bout at Ninth Anniversary Show in Chicago Ridge, which concluded in a draw. The tag team bout is the rubber match of a series between The Kings and WGTT. An opportune time for a title change has now become unpredictable due to Shelton Benjaminís recent WWE dark match against Curt Hawkins at the Smackdown tapings in Houston, Texas. Since then Benjamin has remained mum on whether or not this will lead to a return to WWE. Whether that happens sooner, later or not at all and regardless of the outcome of the ROH World Tag Team Title match on April 1st, the next night will see Wrestlingís Greatest Tag Team match up against one of ROH's best team in history, The American Wolves of Davey Richards and Eddie Edwards. That alone is an impressive dream match that makes the second show worth watching.

ROH has also brought some international presence by importing several Joshi wrestlers from S-Ovation including Hiroyo Matsumoto, Ayumi Kurihara and Tomoka Nakagawa. They have wrestled for SHIMMER Wrestling Athletes in previous months and impressed there. Other talent also scheduled for the ROH weekend shows include El Generico, Jay and Mark Briscoe and Homicide.

Dragon Gate USA
(with CWF-Mid Atlantic and Rampage Pro Wrestling)

Show: "Open The Southern Gate"
When: April 1st, 2011
Where: Mid Atlantic Sportatorium
1813 Frank Holt Dr.
Burlington, NC 27215

Shows: "Mercury Rising 2011"
"Open The Ultimate Gate 2011"
When: April 2nd & 3rd, 2011
The Presidential Ballroom
4001 Presidential Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30340
Bell Times: April 1st: CWF: 7 PM; DGUSA: 8 PM
April 2nd: RPW: 6:30 PM; DGUSA: 8 PM
April 3rd: 12 PM
Prices: $20 -$75

http://www.dgusa.tv
http:// www.cwf247.com
http://rampageprowrestling.net

Dragon Gate USA makes its way to Wrestlemania weekend for a second year, improving on their effort by going with three shows in three days. They run in Burlington,

North Carolina and then head down about six hours and 400 miles to Atlanta for two shows, including one on the same day as Wrestlemania!
Interestingly, DGUSA has decided to join forces with local promotions in both areas, co-promoting events with CWF Mid-Atlantic and Rampage Pro Wrestling at the same venue before the Dragon Gate USA events. Those who purchase tickets are able to see both shows, effectively making it two-for-the-price-of-one.

As for DGUSA, their three events center around two major themes-the stable warfare between the powerful Blood Warriors unit against the American upstart trio Ronin and the defenses of major DG Japan and DG USA Titles over the course of the three-day event. On the April 2nd event YAMATO defends the promotionís Open the Freedom Gate Title against Austin Aries, who has been in the news recently for being cut from the WWE Tough Enough reprise and questioning his career priorities. Aries stumped for a title shot online and received it with the stipulation that he would leave the promotion if he lost (if he wins he'll appear on the April 3rd show).

The April 1st event features a **Stable Shootout with the aforementioned groups participating in a series of different stipulation matches** PAC & Ricochet fight Chuck Taylor & Akira Tozawa **in a 'Dream Partner' Tag Match**. Then a **one-on-one match between the stables sees veteran** CIMA fight against Johnny Gargano, the man who begged to team with him and then reneged and formed Ronin in the first place. Then in 'Pick Your Poison' matches, **Ronin selected Jon Moxley to fight the Blood Warriorís** Naruki Doi, while Sami Callahan was chosen to wrestle against Rich Swann.

Also on the 4/1 card is a 'Breakout Challenge', with the winners of two 'Four Way Freestyle' matches fighting against each other. Bracket one will feature Arik Cannon, AR Fox, Facade and Shiima Xion while bracket two has the debut of Jimmy Rave as well as Jon Davis, Kyle Matthews and Sugar Dunkerton. Brodie Lee will also appear.

The CWF Mid-Atlantic show will feature: Mid-Atlantic Heavyweight Champion Lee Valiant, Kamakazi Kid, Mid-Atlantic Tag Team Champions The VA Bombers of Jason Blade & Adam Page, Chiva Kid, Ric Converse and PWI International Ultra J Champion Xsiris.

In addition to the previously detailed title match, the April 2nd event features the return of the highly praised annual Dragon Gate Six-Man match with Blood Warriors (CIMA, Naruki Doi & Ricochet) against Ronin (Chuck Taylor, Johnny Gargano & Rich Swann).

Other matches include an **Open The Brave Gate Title Match** with champion PAC defending against Akira Tozawa, Stalker Ichikawa vs. Jon Moxley. Also appearing will be Open The Dream Gate Champion Masato Yoshino and Jimmy Jacobs.

DGUSA HAS DECIDED TO JOIN FORCES WITH LOCAL PROMOTIONS IN BOTH AREAS....

The RPW show (for Golden Circle and stage ticket purchases) includes an RPW Heavyweight Title Match with J-Rod vs. Bull Buchanan, an RPW Tag Title Match with The Usual Suspects of Murder 1 & AJ Steele vs. Hot Like Lava of Cru Jones & Shaun Banks, Jimmy Rave vs. Kyle Matthews and Sal Rinauro vs. Sugar Dunkerton.

DGUSA concludes with a matinee on April 3rd. Signed for that show will be an Open The United Gate Title Match with champions Masato Yoshino & PAC defending against CIMA & Ricochet, Open The Freedom Gate Champion YAMATO against his former Kamikaze USA stablemate Akira Tozawa in a non-title grudge match, Naruki Doi vs. Johnny Gargano and a six-man match with Brodie Lee vs. Jimmy Rave vs. Sami Callihan vs. Jimmy Jacobs vs. Chuck Taylor vs. AR Fox, with additional matches to be announced.

5 Dollar Wrestling

When: Saturday April 2nd, 2011
Where: The Academy Theatre
Time: 11 PM until (and I quote) "We get kicked out!!!!!"
Price: $5 (of course)

http://www.highspots.com
http://www.savefans.com

Quickly becoming the "Mystery Science Theatre 3000" of the wrestling world, Five Dollar Wrestling features Colt Cabana and comedian Marty DeRosa dishing humorous barbs and one-liners while watching some of the dirt worst professional wrestling and putting back some brewskis.

WrestleReunion

Show: "Curtain Call for Bruno"
When: Sunday, April 3rd, 2011
Where: Atlanta Marriott Downtown
160 Spring Street NW Atlanta, GA 30303
Time: Opens 10 AM
12 PM to 3 PM - Autograph Signing & Photo Ops
3 PM to 4:30 PM - Luncheon with Bruno Sammartino
Price: VIP Ticket (1 autograph & 1 photo op with all WrestleReunion guests plus Luncheon): $199; Luncheon Non-VIP ticket ($59); Non-VIP autograph tickets available

http://www.wrestlereunion.com
http://www.atlantamarriottdowntown.com

This convention of wrestling stars runs once again after coming off the successful three-day weekend in Los Angeles, California this past January. The theme of the event is a celebration for Bruno Sammartino, who is reportedly making his last 'convention' signing appearance with this show. There will be a luncheon held in his honor. Also set to appear: Lita, Jackie Gayda-Haas, Charlie Haas, Shelton Benjamin, New Jack and Terri Runnels plus vendor guests including Carlito, Christy Hemme, Scott Steiner, Tommy Dreamer, Kamala, Iron Sheik & Nikolai Volkoff, Scott Steiner, Mickie James, Wynter, Bob Orton Jr. and more.

ROH
In A Post HDNet World

Words: **CHRIS GST**

January 26th, 2009 the day that Ring of Honor fans had hoped and dreamed for since its debut onto PPV in 2007. It was the day that the largest Indy promotion told its fans that they had signed a TV deal with HDNet Fights for two years to showcase their talent.

At the time ROH had a huge roster of up and coming talent including current WWE United States Champion Daniel Bryan (Bryan Danielson), Seth Rollins aka Tyler Black, TNA talent Nigel McGuinness (Desmond Wolfe) alongside the international flavor of Pro Wrestling NOAH in a great talent exchange that currently is in talks to occur again.

Others included the legendary Jerry Lynn, Indy standout Austin Aries, and of course the mainstays of Ring of Honor The Briscoes. The fans salivated at the thought of seeing these "best kept secrets" in the world of pro wrestling potentially on television for the first time.

The TV deal with HDNet gave wrestling fans some of the best action on television for the past two years including contests like Bryan Danielson vs. Takeshi Morishima, KENTA vs. Chris Hero and Davey Richards vs. Eddie Edwards to name a few. We also saw the much invigorated initiative towards their tag division which right now is touting some of the best feuds in recent memory.

However, the talent cannot be the only thing that Ring of Honor thrives on nine years into their existence.

While it has always been known that some talent would one day move on to "greener pastures", it has been a struggle for Ring of Honor to create the stars that will carry them into 2011 as quickly as they did during the exodus of A.J. Styles, Christopher Daniels, and Samoa Joe some years before.

IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT DELIRIOUS WAS GOING TO START HIS REIGN AS BOOKER....

This coming April, the dream will be over. It has been reported by major insider websites that HDNet Fights have not signed them to a new deal. It would be this announcement that could

Davey Richards vs El Generico
© Scott Finkelstein

possibly signal the end of the road has come for ROH when it comes to being a television presence. At the same time it could be a silver lining in the clouds for several reasons.

I've been a fan of the promotion since its inception in 2002, after viewing their first DVD "Era of Honor Begins". I was hooked on their presentation of wrestling. It was a combination of many different styles of wrestling booked in an obviously crowd pleasing combination.

It was great for the fans that were there and the growing DVD fan base that Ring of Honor based its sales on in the beginning. After the controversy surrounding ROH in 2004, a semi-dramatic change was made in the way Ring of Honor was booked.

It became more important to get the crowd into strong storylines than just a DVD friendly product. Of course word broke out and many current stars of today's mainstream companies were taken from ROH to compete in front of a larger crowd names such as AJ Styles, Evan Bourne (Matt Sydal) and of course CM Punk to name a few.

Imagine if these guys had been able to stay in Ring of Honor and were the top faces of ROH TV? What a show it could be, but of course that is the wrestling business. I do believe that as a niche market what must be understood is that sometimes what we like as wrestling fans doesn't necessarily translate to a national audience.

As a steady fan of the Indy scene since about 2001 I would say that certain promotions could probably not make it on a national television base. Promotions like CHIKARA or even Dragon Gate USA are not cut out for nationwide television and anyone that cares to make the argument feel free to drop me a line. I do believe that ROH over the past two years has hit a TV friendly formula even though it is hardly recognizable to the formula it had at its inception, like it or not.

Many ROH fans spoke out against the subtle changes and even more made a huge boom when beloved booker Gabe Sapolsky was let ago amidst rumors that he just wasn't comfortable writing a TV friendly product and

was "burnt out", something that later on he did admit to and has stated since that perhaps his being let go was the best thing that could have happened to him.

We've seen two bookers since his release. Current NWA Heavyweight Champion Adam Pearce took over for a bit in 2010 until August when it was announced that Hunter Johnston known around the Indy circuit as Delirious was going to start his reign as booker. Delirious is the head trainer of the ROH Academy and was reportedly writing for Pro Wrestling RESPECT which is the student based promotion to give them exposure to a live crowd before they are in front of a larger ROH/HDNet base.

HDNet was not in a lot of homes until the latter part of 2010 and while a lot of homes still got HDNet, it just wasn't a channel even with its MMA base that a lot of people knew about.

Jay Briscoe

Even with all the wrestling online press that ROH put out there for their fans to try to get HDNet, sometimes it just wasn't possible. HDNet Fights is not a popular channel in the US, you can only get if you pay for high definition service from your TV provider. Many times fans have had to find other ways to watch the show or wait for the Best of HDNet DVDs to see some of the best wrestling matches on TV on a consistent basis.

During this time ROH really got to work on what they felt was a more fan/TV friendly format and in many ways has gotten that down a tad more in terms of shorter opening matches, doing more TV vignettes that put over DVDs and iPPVs as well as providing some good main events that in many ways made the fans want to see the iPPVs or buy the DVDs to see the ends of major feuds.

> **Of course this is something that they still have to work on and it is clearly not a clean science as made obvious in WWE and TNA who still struggle to find that formula to this day.**

As stated before, this could turn into a silver lining in other ways. The first and foremost being, they could get on another channel that could have more exposure, there are many regional channels and many specialty channels such as MTV2 that showcase smaller wrestling promotions.

Even a few of the other promotions I listed previously are reportedly getting some regional channel interest; ROH has a nationwide audience now and requires a channel that can provide that, even if it is a station like a MyNetwork. This of course is the station that used to carry Smackdown for WWE. While it does not have any new content and only plays reruns, it would give ROH a place to be and they might get more eyes on the product because MyNetwork would push it to garner higher ratings.

Of course this would be a huge step for them but it also has a small chance of happening

© Scott Finkelstein

with wrestling not really being a huge ratings machine like it used to be.

That also could be construed into something positive in the state that ROH could step back a little and re-configure their business strategy to go back to the DVD market. Now I'm not saying that they need to go back to DVDs per say. They already have a video on demand service and this to me is the future of the online market.

DVDs should still be made for those who do not have faster internet but with a majority of people pretty much used to downloading and watching stuff on their computer it would make sense for them to push more out of their VOD service.

Not being on TV could make them realize that there is going to be more of a demand to get revenue from this source. I do feel that they really missed the boat when they were on TV and didn't seem to really push their DVDs until the Adam Pearce regime. While it may not be the short term fix, it is definitely a revenue aspect that they could explore more now.

All in all no one truly knows what is going to happen. While I have received many emails from fans and friends alike, a few with more insight than others, **I can surely say that the future of Ring of Honor is anything but black and white. They can still have a great future even beyond HDNet no matter what avenue they decide to partake in.**

In the end it is us, the fans that will benefit the most, from no doubts one of the best promotions of the last decade.

Contact Chris GST at cgstong@gmail.com

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KING OF TRIOS FOR DUMMIES

Words: **KEVIN FORD**

Spring time is an exciting time as a wrestling fan. After all, WrestleMania is right around the corner, which means not only is the WWE putting their best foot forward, but so are many of the top independent wrestling companies. Although many of those companies will be holding the shows the same weekend as WrestleMania, CHIKARA however will be running their biggest weekend of the year just a couple weeks later: The 2011 King of Trios tournament.

© Scott Finkelstein

For those who don't know, CHIKARA is an independent wrestling company based out of Pennsylvania. It's unique blend of different wrestling styles from around the world, as well as its focus on colorful characters and storylines separate it from the rest of the companies around.

CHIKARA takes a lot of its influence from the Lucha Libre style of wrestling, specifically with the company focusing on teams and factions more so than individuals. That focus is no more apparent than in the King of Trios tournament.

For the past four years, CHIKARA has invited trios from all over the world to

KING OF TRIOS FOR DUMMIES

compete in a three night single-elimination tournament. Four of the three tournaments saw sixteen trios compete for the title, though the 2008 installment boasted an unprecedented twenty-eight teams. After the first year, CHIKARA decided to house all three nights at the former ECW Arena in Philadelphia, PA.

This makes travel accommodations for fans and wrestlers alike much more simple. **Wrestlers from all around the world come annually in an attempt to stake their claim as the top trio in all of professional wrestling.** Teams from Ring of Honor, Pro Wrestling Guerrilla, Michinoku Pro, and the WWF have seen competition in tournaments past. Notable names like current WWE United States Champion Bryan Danielson, TNA's The Motor City Machine Guns, former WWF Tag Team Champions Demolition, British wrestling legend Johnny Saint, and others have come to vie for the King of Trios crown.

SO WHAT ABOUT THIS YEAR'S TOURNAMENT?

Once again, sixteen trios from around the world will gather in Philadelphia on the weekend of April 15th to April 17th for King of Trios supremacy. As of press time, fourteen of the sixteen teams have been announced. Some of them are CHIKARA regulars, such as F.I.S.T. who won the 2009 King of Trios tournament (although Johnny Gargano is in the trio this time around instead of former member Gran Akuma). Others include The Colony of Fire Ant, Soldier Ant, and Green Ant, who made it to the finals of the 2010 King of Trios tournament, The Osirian Portal, and others.

KING OF TRIOS FOR DUMMIES

Two-thirds of the 2007 King of Trios tournament winners Mike Quackenbush and Jigsaw will team up with Joshi legend Manami Toyota when they enter the tournament this year. Osaka Pro's team made a big splash last year, and they will be returning for the second year in a row (although Ultimate Spider Jr. will be replacing Tadasuke, who competed in the 2010 tournament).

> **By far the team to receive the biggest response was the team representing Michinoku Pro, which will consist of Puro legends The Great Sasuke, Jinsei Shinzaki (better known as Hakushi in the U.S.), and Dick Togo, who is making one last trip to the United States before retiring from professional wrestling altogether.**

Used with permission from www.chikarapro.com

Other noteable names in the tournament include Sinn Bodhi (known as Kizarny in the WWE), TNA superstar The Amazing Red, ROH mainstay El Generico, and many more.

WHY IS WINNING KING OF TRIOS SO IMPORTANT?

Simply put, the tournament is held in such high regard that just by participating, your recognition goes through the roof across the independent wrestling landscape. Before King of Trios, no one outside of the die-hard Illinois wrestling fans had even heard of Da Soul Touchaz (who are now semi-regulars in CHIKARA). Johnny Saint had *never* wrestled in the United States, but King of Trios was such a big deal that he took the opportunity to come stateside.

The Young Bucks were essentially confined to the SoCal region of the U.S. until CHIKARA brought them into the 2009 Trios tournament. After that, they began to pop up everywhere and eventually signed with TNA. Winning the tournament is of course a big deal as well. Chuck Taylor won the 2009 tournament by making Bryan Danielson tap out to a cross crab. To this day, whenever he puts the hold on in a match, some commentators point out

KING OF TRIOS FOR DUMMIES

that Taylor made "the Best in the World" submit to that hold. Whether you're a North American wrestler looking to breakout or an international star looking to expand your horizons, King of Trios is the place to be.

The past two years have seen CHIKARA hold a tournament within a tournament. On Nights 2 and 3, CHIKARA crowns its annual "Rey de Voladores", which loosely translates to "King of the Rockets" in English. The format sees two four-man elimination matches on Night 2, with the winners of those matches meeting in the Finals on Night 3. The winner is rewarded with a plaque and the "Rey de Voladores" title for that year.

The first two tournaments took place outside of King of Trios, but with all the international talent that comes through, it made perfect sense to include the tournament within King of Trios weekend. Osirian Portal member Ophidian won the tournament last year by beating WWE Tough Enough cast member Matt Cross in the finals. The year before that, DDT superstar Kota Ibushi took home the plaque. It is unknown as of press time whether or not the Rey de Voladores tournament will be returning this year, but logic would dictate that it's return is more likely than not.

In addition to the tournament itself, CHIKARA will hold its fourth annual Fan Conclave on the afternoon of Saturday April 16th. The Fan Conclave is a two hour event where fans can not only meet the wrestlers, but interact with them. CHIKARA lines up a myriad of activities for fans and wrestlers to participate in together.

KING OF TRIOS FOR DUMMIES

Years past have seen wrestlers do various activities with the fans, such as play Rock Band, Fire Pro Wrestling and board games, karaoke, cut promos, and take embarrassing family photos. This year, CHIKARA is bringing in melodic rock icon Stan Bush to perform a miniature concert at the Conclave. Stan is best known for providing songs for the soundtracks to the original "Transformers" movie and the Jean Claude Van Damme vehicle "Bloodsport", and also provides the theme for this year's tournament: "The Touch (Stan's Theme)".

There's also a bodyslam challenge, where fans can step up to the plate to try and bodyslam Tursas (who is nearly 7 feet tall and just shy of 400 pounds). More activities will be announced as the weeks roll on.

This year will be the third King of Trios tournament I attend live. The only way to describe the atmosphere is "addicting". I have attended numerous wrestling events over the years and I can safely say there has been no more fun weekend of wrestling I've participated in than King of Trios. If you have the means, I highly suggest attending, even if it's just for one of the three nights.

The DVD's have turned out to be "must-buys" year after year and there's no reason to believe this year will be any different. Even if you're brand new to CHIKARA, King of Trios is a fantastic entry point to jump on board. The entire wrestling world will be paying attention to what exactly goes down. After all, it is the largest tournament in professional wrestling today.

■ **Contact Kevin Ford at kford13@gmail.com**

© Scott Finkelstein

Shinsuke Nakamura

interview

By
ANDREW DIXON

The Japanese wrestling scene is quite possibly one of the hardest to break in to, with many up and comers falling to the notorious NJPW Dojo, even before getting into the ring.

But some talents are born to succeed in this environment, Shinsuke Nakamura is no exception. He defied huge amounts of pressure to become the youngest ever IWGP champion at the age of 22 and continues to have a good amount of success to this day, consistently ranking in the top 25 of the PWI 500 for the past 3 years.

TWP's Andrew Dixon recently had the opportunity to talk with Nakamura and take a chronological look at his career, discussing his early rise to the top, his overseas experiences and his thoughts on WWE/TNA.

Hello Shinsuke, I'd like to start by asking you about the notorious NJPW Dojo where you were trained. Could you tell me what a standard day consisted of?

Every wrestler has their own schedule and training methods but in my case I train at the NJPW Dojo, a local kickboxing gym, MMA gym and swimming a lot at a nearby pool. If my tour schedule is not too tight, my day usually starts by visiting the Dojo in the morning, followed by physical/strength training in the afternoon and either kickboxing or MMA in the evening.

Who inspired you to get into wrestling? And were you a fan as a child?

I loved the bright image of New Japan Pro-Wrestling. There were no particular wrestlers

that inspired me but when I saw the Tokyo Dome wrestling event on TV, I really wanted to walk the long catwalk to the ring. The company presentation and impression inspired me to become a wrestler.

You made your debut for New Japan in 2002, quickly rising up the ranks, known as the Super Rookie, do you think that maybe it was extra pressure on you to constantly up your game as it seemed NJPW had already decided you were it's next big star?

I took the regular Dojo entry test to enter New Japan Pro Wrestling. I never considered myself as the "Super Rookie", although the name seemed to be associated with me a lot. My debut bout at Budokan Hall was definitely my first chance to be noticed and it was a huge start. I still don't know why I was selected but at the time, I just thought it was luck. At the same time, I felt the envy and jealousy from the fellow wrestlers around me but I ignored the noise. The wrestler I pride myself on being will not let any opportunity go by. But of course, there was a great amount of pressure; it even made me ill on some occasions early on.

During your early years (2002-2004), you also took part in MMA matches, ending with a W/L/D record of 3-1-1. Was it difficult for you to adapt back and forth between pro wrestling and MMA/shoot fights?

Nothing is as easy as it looks but it does depend on the timing and the stage (promotion). Obviously the tougher it gets, the more challenging for me, but I welcome the challenge. Wrestlers should face tougher obstacles and take risks to prove that they are true wrestlers. I enjoyed my MMA matches and wouldn't rule out any more fights in the future.

Now, on December 9th 2003, less than 2 years after your debut, you claimed the biggest prize in Japanese wrestling, the IWGP Heavyweight Championship by defeating Hiroyoshi Tenzan. In turn, you became the youngest wrestler in history to win the title. When your hand was raised and you were awarded the belt, what was going through your mind?

I felt thrilled to be known as the #1 wrestler in NJPW, but no wrestler congratulated me for winning the IWGP title at my first attempt due to my young age. The veterans all claimed "it's too heavy for him" or "it's not going to work out." And I taught myself that there will always be pressure and jealousy against me. In those days, without having a proven career like a veteran, without a technique, I was struggling to change the course of Japanese pro-wrestling history my own way. So I took everything as it is and gave it 110% no matter what or who was in my way, and to this day, that is exactly how I am.

TO ME, IT WAS MORE LIKE A DESTINY TO FACE KURT ANGLE ....

Less than a month later on January 4th 2004, you added another title to your resume after defeating Yoshihiro Takayama, unifying the NWF Heavyweight title with your IWGP version. However, on February 5th, you were forced to vacate your title due to various injuries which needed treatment, I should mention for readers that the worst injuries came from your K-1 bout with Alexey Ignashov on December 31st 2003, which was ruled a No Contest. From the great highs to the sad lows, can you describe what injuries you were suffering from while champion and your thoughts on vacating the title instead of dropping it to a fellow wrestler?

After the IWGP & NWF double title match and the New Years Eve K-1 match shoulder and arm injuries, the doctors stopped me from fighting and wrestling. I decided to give up the title because if I could not fight, then I shouldn't be the champion. During my rehab, I flew to the USA and started training for my K-1 MMA re-match against Ignashov which I then won.

Used with permission from TheSuicidalDragon

Upon your return, you were partnered with Hiroshi Tanahashi and together you won the IWGP Tag Team titles, which led to your first venture out of Japan, defending the belts successfully in Mexico. As a young guy travelling to another country famous for its wrestling traditions, did you learn anything there that you could adapt into your own style of wrestling?

Wrestling in Mexico taught me great depth of wrestling culture. Technique, timing, response of the crowd, etc. It was all different from Japan, but I enjoyed adjusting to suit the Mexican fans. Also, at CMLL's biggest anniversary event called Aniversario, I won over El Santo and Arena Mexico was shocked. I guess that was how I was judged in Mexico.

Once you had lost the Tag Team titles, you challenged current UFC star Brock Lesnar for the IWGP title, but you were unsuccessful. However, following this you travelled to the States again and developed a much bigger look and stiffer style. There were some rumours that you even trained with Brock. What was your time in America like and how did you build the mass?

The match with Lesnar was tough, very tough, he is an amazing athlete, but I never trained with him. In the States, I consumed 10,000 calories per day to put on weight as well as heavy cardio and weight training. Looking back at it now, trying to eat that much every day was a disaster but a good experience for me haha.

Mounted Punches by Nakamura
© puroresucentral.com

During this time away from NJPW, there were reportedly plans for you to appear for WWE at the request of John Laurinaitis. This was for you to gain exposure to American crowds but this never materialised, was there any truth to this and what is your take on the American wrestling scene? Do you see yourself working for WWE or TNA in the future? Or even trying to break into UFC?

During my stay in the States, I did get an offer from UFC but it wasn't the right time to me, you never know what can happen though. Regarding WWE, I was never personally told anything about it from anyone. But if that were to be true and if my contract was up with NJPW, then I would've jumped at the opportunity to have a tryout at a WWE event. If there is a need for me and a good offer, I'm confident I could perform well in WWE, TNA or any promotion.

One month after capturing the title, you had what many called a dream match, and you faced Kurt Angle on February 17th 2008, defeating him to unify the IGF version of the IWGP Heavyweight title with your NJPW championship.

Describe the experience of being in the ring with Angle, someone who is considered the best in the world.

To me, it was more like a destiny to face Kurt Angle. Plus it was the second time in my career to have a double title match. One of the belts was the newly designed IWGP title which Lesnar stole from NJPW and Kurt brought back. In the bout, a person who has an amateur wrestling background may understand but there was a tremendous amount of wrestling pressure. Kurt has the top level basic techniques and the inside works which I really respect. The bout time was short but it felt very long, much more different from my regular bouts, he exhausted me. Kurt not only knows how to wrestle but he knows how to fight MMA style. I like his style a lot and have the utmost respect for him.

Nakamura with a German Suplex
© puroresucentral.com

Can you elaborate on what you said, about Brock stealing the title belt? What happened?

Well, Brock apparently had visa problems and couldn't get to Japan to defend the belt, but I will say that there are various other reasons thrown around but I was busy focusing on myself so I distanced away from the situation. IGF claimed that Lesnar was still the real IWGP champion so NJPW created a new belt which I held at the time Kurt Angle beat Lesnar for the IGF version of the title, and the match we talked about before was then signed.

From April 2008 when you lost your title to Keiji Muto, you had a bad run, unsuccessfully challenging on numerous occasions for the Tag Team and Heavyweight titles. You then shocked New Japan by turning heel and creating the group known as CHAOS. Being a heel was a new direction for you, did you find it hard to adapt to this change at first?

Compared with Muto, I have a very different perspective towards pro wrestling. If I can wrestle him again, I want revenge because I'm not proud of the record. Switching to heel, I had a certain vision on how NJPW should be, I had to take things in my own hands in a big way. Changing and innovating my style at that time was necessary to give a push to NJPW which lost the original edge that attracted me in the first place. I'm not speaking of the 90's style, it's about the original, where it all began, and to create this modernised style, there was trial-and-error. By fighting and teaming in CHAOS, I've eliminated many elements and with what was left recently, now creating MY style.

I am still in the process of innovating and will forever be evolving but as a wrestler and leader, in every match, I've pushed my vision, belief and strength.

Your run as a heel has led to a third IWGP title which you held for just over 7 months before another shoulder injury forced you to take more time off.

Yes, this was a re-occurance of my previous injury and needed intense treatment and rehab, but I felt that I could come back even stronger in the future. Which I ultimately proved haha.

Yes indeed, upon your return, you had a strong showing in the 2010 G1 Climax but just missed out after wrestling to a time limit draw with Go Shiozaki. You recently ended your feud with him by beating him on 4th January 2011 at Wrestle Kindgom V. Now what does 2011 hold for you? I assume you will be looking to reclaim the IWGP title?

Shiozaki is given many opportunities and probably is blessed by God just like me, but he may not have realized that yet. I don't see

his determination in accepting his fate. The fans expect more than 100% from him, but with just a little extra, he may turn into a greater wrestler. Wearing higher heeled boots may help his legs look longer though... Super Stars need long legs haha.

Talking about 2011... Again, I want to continue to break the dull and routine atmosphere of the modern NJPW through my bouts and of course become the IWGP and the G1 champ.

Of the current crop of guys coming to Japan, who do you see as a future star? Guys like Prince Devitt have shown that with dedication, it's possible to make it as a star. Who impresses you when you see them wrestle?

The Japanese fans tend to reject stars that are "made" by the company. Many of the Japanese wrestling fans see the growth of a wrestler and become their fans. Regarding Devitt, he studied the New Japan style and adapted it into his repertoire and pushed his possibilities, and then he was able to turn the chance he was given into gold, as is proven by his current run as IWGP Jr. Heavyweight champion and also as Jr. Heavyweight Tag Team champion. Along with Devitt, Karl "Machine Gun" Anderson and Giant Bernard (formerly A-Train in WWE) are also starting to make a bigger mark in the Japanese ring.

Who would you like to wrestle that you haven't already?

I don't care, as long as they have true technique. I believe pro wrestling lies in the middle of fighting and entertainment. A pro wrestler should display their mental strength, technique, and their body strength. Amongst these, I emphasise true skill and expression through wrestling. Any worthy opponent should naturally display these abilities.

I'M CONFIDENT I COULD PERFORM WELL IN WWE, TNA OR ANY PROMOTION....

And finally, with NJPW's US tour coming up, do you see yourself and New Japan heading to the UK or Europe in the near future too and do you have a message for your fans over here?

The US tour will be a huge step forward for the company and hopefully attract a bigger audience to the puroresu style in Japan, US fans are starting to see more of it on the independent scene and if we even make one new fan, then it's a success.

Nakamura and Hiroshi Tanahashi pose the IWGP Tag Team titles
© New Japan Pro Wrestling

On the UK and Europe, I'd fly anywhere around the world if possible, I enjoy the thrill of a new audience. Your cheers will advance me to becoming the pro wrestler I still to this day aspire to become, thank you for your support!

■ **Contact Andrew at andrew.dixon_1990@yahoo.co.uk**

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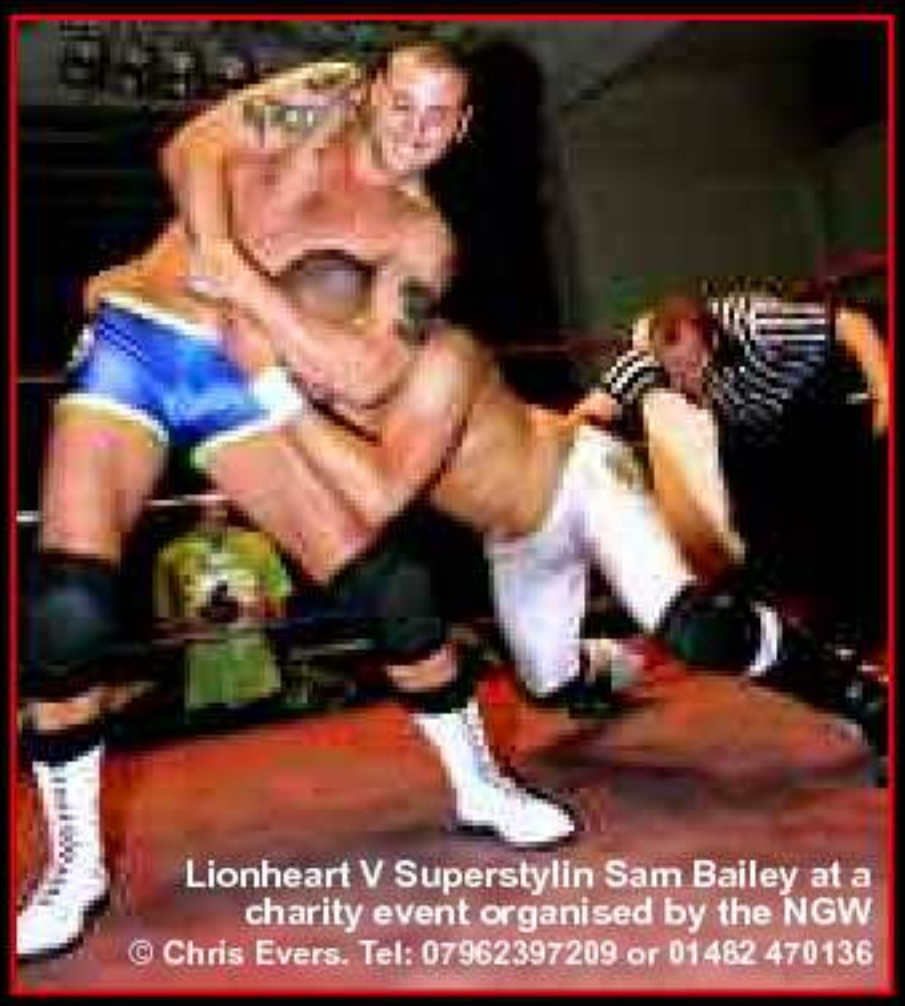
SCOTTISH WRESTLER LIONHEART WRITES EXCLUSIVELY FOR TWP

With this being my debut column, it would seem highly appropriate that my beginnings with TWP Magazine reflect somewhat on my beginnings within the Pro Wrestling industry. As we fast approach the annual extravaganza known as WrestleMania, we witness the return to PPV, of the Superstar who single handedly cemented my desire to be a Sports Entertainer.



Lionheart V Superstylin Sam Bailey at a charity event organised by the NGW
© Chris Evers. Tel: 07962397209 or 01482 470136

For those who have somehow missed what has been referred to as the most obvious idolization in British Wrestling, I am of course referring to The Rock. It seems almost to have too easily fallen into place, that as I am planning to write my first column about my initial passion for wrestling and my desire to get into the business, the biggest factor returns and brings my passion back to an even greater height than it was before, mere days before the biggest and most prestigious event in the industry, WrestleMania.

As a young kid, I always loved watching wrestling, convinced Hulk Hogan could have taken on Superman if he wanted to. As I grew older and all of my friends grew out of it, I never really did. I went through a phase of not watching it as much, but certainly I always followed it in some capacity, making sure to catch the Pay-Per-Views.

Like most who stuck with it, I moved with the times. My new heroes were guys like Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels, and then later The Rock. Unlike his predecessors, I never really grew out of my idolization of The Rock, and as time went on, I knew that this was what I wanted to do, and WWE was where I wanted to be.

Fast forward a few years (ok about 10 years to be exact, God I feel old) and I'm doing what I love to do and always wanted to (albeit on a

Jeff Jarrett takes advantage of a sleeping referee!

© Tony Knox

part time basis), while still fortunate (or unfortunate depending how some may look at it) enough to still actually be a huge fan of the business.

A big problem in wrestling is when people become involved as performers; they become so embroiled in the negative aspects they forget how to just enjoy it and have fun.

Over the years I've had some amazing times, and already in my relatively modest career have gained some great friends and share some great memories. As the months pass and my columns progress, I will share some of these memories with you as well as some stories of how on more than one occasion I would go into a match or a situation thinking I was the dogs bollocks, only to come out realising that I didn't know shit and had just learned more in 15 minutes than I had in all the years prior.

It's these experiences that you remember because they are the ones that make you the man you are. **The first story next month will centre around a man, known to many in the wrestling business**, a man who is spoken of fondly by colleagues and a man who was and still is loved and respected by workers and fans the world over… Tracy Smothers.

As an intro, this column will seem relatively short, however in the coming months it should worth a better read ;)

For now, I will continue to do what I love week after week, and strive daily to reach that level where I can finally achieve the biggest of dreams and make it as a full time Entertainer in the world of pro wrestling.

While that is happening I shall be watching WrestleMania on April 3rd, keen to see some of the top performers in the industry today, attempt to cement their legacy in show stealing matches that are sure to take place.

I shall also be watching with the excitement of a 12 year old boy, eager to witness the impending showdown between the Rock and John Cena, which I cannot wait for.

Hope you all enjoy the show.

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VPW SHOW REVIEW

Words: **PHIL AUSTIN**

My journey from London to Portsmouth was a fairly arduous one. I'd been invited down to attend a VPW show at the Portsmouth Guildhall on February 25th, and being a Friday night the traffic was particularly bad. Over three hours after I left my house, I arrived at the Guildhall, and settled down to watch a show featuring virtually nobody I'd ever heard of! Or so I'd think...

IT WAS FUN TO WATCH PEOPLE WHO REMEMBERED HOW TO ENJOY A WRESTLING SHOW

The show itself had a really nice presentation. Spectacular pyro introduced the show and the main event, the whole event itself had a giant video screen to present highlight packages and interviews to the crowd.

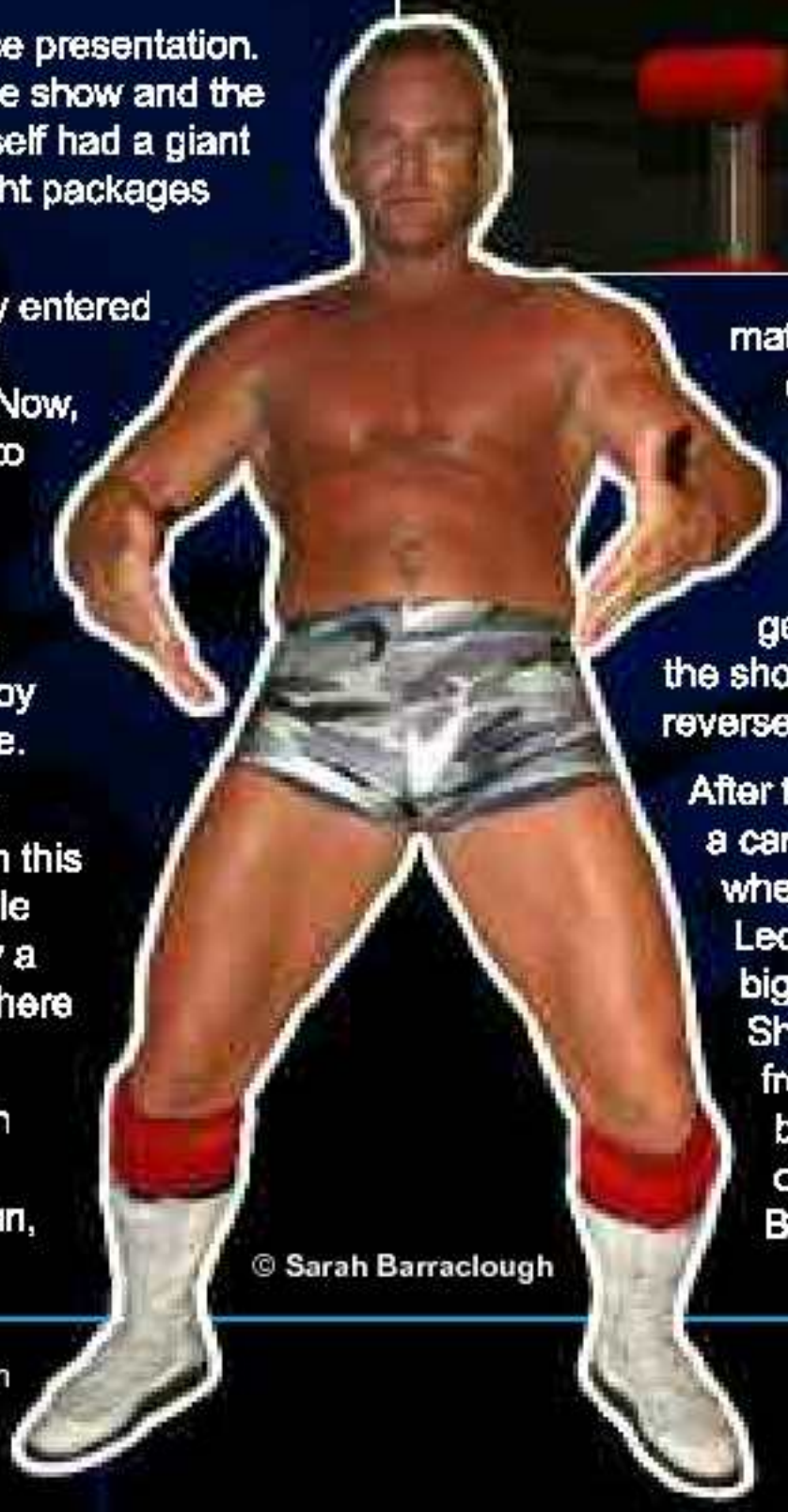
Ring announcer Steve Lynskey entered the ring and introduced VPW's number one heel, the UK Kid. Now, to be fair, it was a little difficult to hear things due to some problems with the microphone and PA system, but the gist of this opening conversation was that UK Kid was going to destroy Jake McCluskey in a steel cage.

The crowd, largely made up of families, was into everything on this show. It was fun to watch people who remembered how to enjoy a wrestling show rather than sit there criticizing it.

Match number one saw Nathan McKenzie take on the cocky Trevor Manners. A basic, yet fun, match, this was a good opener. Nothing spectacular, other than a nice frog splash attempt by McKenzie, but it worked well in getting the crowd going for the show. Manners won with a reverse backcracker.

After this, Steve Lynskey took a cameraman backstage where his interview with Leon Shah appeared on the big screen for the crowd. Shah was coming back from injury and made short but effective work of his opponent for the night, Bruce Magnum.

The UK Kid dispatches another victim!
© Sarah Barraclough



© Sarah Barraclough

Up next was a segment introduced by a local radio show presenter named Shireen. The young lass introduced Rob Holte who, after riling up the crowd by being from rival town Southampton and rubbing that in their faces, told Shireen that she wasn't pretty enough to be on TV like his girl Jemma Palmer (from TV's Gladiators). Shireen slapped him and, as Holte turned to answer the slap, the lights went out and 'I'm An Ass Man' played over the loudspeakers. Billy Gunn appeared!

The unannounced Billy Gunn was WAY better here than I remember him being in the WWF. A true pro, Gunn had a nice back and forth bout with Holte, and knew exactly how to work the excited crowd into a frenzy. He even got in a few Rock references in his promo. The Fame Asser finisher was exactly what the crowd wanted to see.

Next up, Bryan Clark (a UK wrestler, not the former Adam Bomb) beat up a poor unfortunate young man named Robbie Everest. Clark is large, intimidating and, when he squared off with the equally large Leon after the match was over, I for one was intrigued to see the impending match between the two.

It was main event time. A steel cage was set up and impressive pyro introduced firstly the UK Kid and then young Jake McCluskey. I hadn't seen McCluskey since the dying days of the original FWA, and he's really come on a lot since those days. A young high flier, the crowd loved this man as much as they hated UK Kid.

The match itself was great! UK Kid hit some hard looking clotheslines and formers, while McCluskey countered with some spectacular highflying moves, including a nice looking lionsault and a standing moonsault off of the back of UK Kid.

The highlight though was a great cross body from the top of the cage by McCluskey. This youngster knows no fear.

Fans of old school WWF would get a kick out of the finish. In shades of Hogan/Orndorff, both men climbed down opposite sides of the cage at the same time, with Jake just getting to the floor first to get the win.

The crowd went home happy and Jake and Billy Gunn both hung around to sign plenty of autographs and shake hands. A wrestling show for the family audience, but one that the more hardcore audience could enjoy as well….maybe this is what wrestling should be if it wants to be successful

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Contact Phil at PhilUK1@aol.com

HUGE CROWDS, HUGE STARS, ANOTHER HUGE SUCCESS!

[illegible] VARSITY PRO WRESTLING

During [illegible] Sports Entertainment Company [illegible] tour [illegible] stars [illegible] "Mr Moonsault" [illegible] Portsmouth Guildhall [illegible] moments after defeating [illegible] cage match that [illegible] and "the [illegible] in years". VPW's most successful and spectacular [illegible] close. Starting with an impressive debut in [illegible], following with the organisation's monthly swing through Basingstoke and culminating at the Guildhall, the tour featured hard-hitting, high-flying and hugely entertaining action from beginning to end.

The apex of the tour came in the Guildhall as the 712 raucous VPW fans witnessed a show that caused the Portsmouth News to report "Varsity Pro Wrestling made the jump from local wrestling show to the epitome of sports entertainment". High praise indeed but warranted - the show represented a colossal step forward in the presentation of VPW's product, adding spectacular pyrotechnic displays to go along with the VPW-Tron on the Guildhall stage. The steel cage match, a bout rarely seen on UK soil, gave the event a Pay-Per-View feel and the unadvertised appearance of global wrestling megastar Billy Gunn capped a truly memorable evening.

"This company is the real deal" said Gunn. "I've toured across the world and without a doubt, VPW is the best sports entertainment company in the UK." Gunn was also full of praise for his opponent at the Guildhall, "Basingstoke Bulldog" Rob Holte. "He impressed me, I didn't take him lightly but he pushed me further than I expected. That was a heck of a match. He's one tough guy and he's going to be a big star."

Other superstars on the tour included the impressive 6'4 mammoth Leon Shah, TJ Manners, Nathan The Eagle McKenzie, UK Gladiator's own Inferno and The Pride of England Robbie Everest. Check back on varsityprowrestling.com regularly for more information on the VPW Spring 2011 tour and join the VPW Facebook group by searching Varsity ProWrestling.

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[illegible] "The UK KID" has been in the wrestling business [illegible] and WWF Hall of Famer [illegible]

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For more information [illegible] up coming [illegible] camps

please visit www.varsityprowrestling.com

JOHNNY MOSS

PROFILE

Words: **DARREN WOOD**
Photos: **TONY KNOX**

Without the obvious exceptions, few from Britain and Ireland have ever been great success stories across the pond, but over the past year it seems that now that has all changed.

Take a quick glance at the rosters of the two major promotions in North America, WWE and TNA and you will notice that there is a pretty strong British and Irish contingent impressing in both companies.

Over in the Stamford, Connecticut based WWE, Sheamus is the current King of the Ring as well as a former two time WWE Champion, Drew McIntrye has an Intercontinental Championship reign under his belt and Wade Barrett quickly become a headliner on Monday Night RAW, as the leader of The Nexus.

While over in Florida outfit TNA, Douglas Williams is a former Television and X-Division Champion, Desmond Wolfe has been in major feuds with Kurt Angle and Abyss to name a few and Rob Terry is a former TNA Global Champion.

It seems that now more than ever both promotions are taking a real good look at Britain and Ireland,s top talent so the question has to be asked could more talent from these great shores be heading over to try and make it big in America?

Back in January as part of TNA's Maximum Impact tour, TNA founder Jeff Jarrett faced one of Britain's best on each date of the tour in his "JJ MMA Challenge" which offered a $100,000 prize to anyone who could make him submit.

It was on January 29th, at the Wembley arena, London that one of the UK's finest stars "Vigilante" Johnny

© Tony Knox

Mosssquared off against Jarrett aiming to make a big impression and take a giant leap towards heading over to America.

Moss, 30, has seen his career span over 11 years, becoming a 5 time NWA United Kingdom Heavyweight Champion in the process. It was the match in London against Jarrett that Moss sees as the biggest of his career thus far even if Jarrett did end up gaining the victory.

"That match was one of the most important of my career," Moss told **TWP**. "It was a hell of a buzz performing in front of a crowd in a building like Wembley. There's a lot of history there, it meant a lot to me.

> **"After the match, I received a lot of positive feedback from the likes of D-Lo Brown, Ric Flair, Rob Van Dam, Mr Anderson and Dixie Carter.**

"I also got a lot of praise for my punches, which I was pleased about because I've only started doing them 6 month ago, I've always been a forearm smash type of guy.

"I was happy with the feedback I got, I knew exactly what my role was before the show and I played it to the best of my ability.

When asked about gaining a possible full time spot on the TNA roster, Moss seemed upbeat about his chances.

"They've seen me work first hand now so I think I'm certainly a step closer to gaining a contract with them than I was before.

"I feel confident that I can make it to a company in America, because I am well versed in any style of wrestling. I am well rounded and with my experience I feel I have a lot better chance to make it in now than I did a few years ago."

Cumbrian born Moss, was first captivated by wrestling back in 1998, when while at a friend's house he we watched WWF. It mesmerized him and after that he collected posters and even started tape trading in order to gain videos of various promotions around the world.

Courtesy of SSW TV

Moss studied these, watching them over and over. WWF and WCW were main promotions but he also watched a lot of ECW and other high flying wrestling, **cruiserweight wrestling really grabbed his attention, with the Best of the Super Juniors 1994, garnering his attention most.**

It was while reading a wrestling magazine that Moss saw an advert for Hammerlock school of wrestling and he went down there to be trained by Andre Baker. Moss is a very versatile performer who can easily do the European mat style mixed with shoot and submission wrestling, and it was at Hammerlock, under Baker's guidance that Moss honed these skills.

The promotion's school also helped train current TNA star Douglas Williams, New Japan's Prince Devitt, former NWA champion Gary Steele and former WWE Diva Katie Lea, among others.

Baker, had a massive influence on Moss' career and over the years the two become very good friends until Baker committed suicide on May 16th 2010. Moss believes that his trainer would have been proud to have seen his encounter with Jarrett.

> **"I took the intensity that he showed in the ring and added that to me. He would always help me out and take me under his wing and I am eternally grateful for all he did for me.**

"He was going to make a comeback to wrestling and I was very supportive of this. I knew he was going through a hard time, I spoke to him Friday and then tried to ring him Saturday but there was no answer. It was at 1am, on the Sunday morning that his sister rang me and told me he had hung himself.

"That was a real hard blow for me. It took a while to come to terms with that.

"I wish he could have seen the match, he would have been so proud."

Since the match against Jarrett Moss, who stands at 6' and weighs 245lbs, has been busy fulfilling dates up in Scotland for promotions such as Insane Championship Wrestling and Scottish Wrestling Association.

"My life hasn't changed at all really since facing Jarrett," Moss said. "Apart from people constantly asking when I'm going to America [laughs]. I am going to the US in April as it happens, but that been organised by the German promotion Westside Xtreme Wrestling, who I love performing for."

While Moss may not have made it to one of the big two companies across the pond just yet, **TWP** thinks that the future looks bright for "The Vigilante".

■ **Contact: Darren at dtwooduk@hotmail.com**

Courtesy of SSW TV

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STARBUCK "THE CANADIAN REBEL" WRITES EXCLUSIVELY FOR TWP

MAKING IT IN JAPAN

I have been very blessed and fortunate over my wrestling career, which started actively on January 7, 1994 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Working as a top player in 16 countries to date, the latest of which has been Japan, I have been given many spotlight opportunities that many contemporaries only dream of. In this light, I am truly grateful to the Good Lord above, and to each promotion that has believed in me, allowing me to prove my stock on the stage that has been given to me.

As anyone who knows anything about pro wrestling can readily understand, success in Japan represents one of the golden grails of achievement in our business. Really, outside of Japan, Mexico is the only country of pro wrestling reknown aside from the USA's WWE and TNA. It can be argued, that almost everything else worldwide falls into the hand-to-mouth independent category as far as promotions and territories go, where making a living is wishful thinking and even the best achievement doesn't get the spotlight one might hope for.

Over the course of this past year, I was given a tremendous spotlight opportunity to wrestle for Yoshihiro Tajiri's new SMASH company in Japan. I had worked with Tajiri one time previously, in February 2010 for FCF Wrestling in Finland, the company which I more or less run for all intents and purposes. Based on the

strength of that outing, Tajiri saw a world of potential in me – look, charisma, ability and heart – and booked me to appear for his promotion. As I recall him saying, the Japanese fans would like my "fighting spirit".

Now, I must interject here that since the very beginning of my career, when I first entered the game as a commentator and ring announcer in Calgary in the fall of 1992, I have always held the Land of the Rising Sun to be paramount as my goal. That is right, WWE has never been the be-all and end-all for me. I have always understood that arguably, the best quality of wrestling worldwide comes from Japan, and only the best really make it there usually. Thus, to achieve a definitive level of success in Japan is to be recognized as being one of the best at what you do, period.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would be positioned immediately at the top, were I to make it to my goal of wrestling in Japan. However, this is exactly what happened with SMASH. Tajiri and his company believed in me so strongly, that they gave me the ball to run with, and left it up to me to produce once I had the ball handed to me. And arguably, I have produced rather well, as the Japanese wrestling fans voted me among the top five gaijin (foreign) wrestlers of the year for 2010, covering all the companies in Japan. That, my friends, is undeniably something special.

But what did it take for me to reach this current level of success in Japan, and in the media's critical eye there? Why did it take me so many years to reach my goal, as I booked kids that I had trained, kids with 2-5 years of experience in the business, into Japan before I got the chance to go there myself?

Well, professional wrestling is not a level playing field for all intents and purposes. It's a game of many painful twists and turns, being in the right place at the right time, owning the needed attributes which translate into box office, and knowing the right people to help you get there. Some luck and the serendipity handed down by the Big Man upstairs goes a long way too, and perhaps they make up the remaining 5% of the whole that puts one over the edge in the end.

The bottom line is I have paid my dues over and over again, both as a promoter and as a worker, regardless of the years I have put into this sport.. I have – in the words of Ric Flair – sweat, bled and paid the price, to become one of the best in Europe today at my chosen craft: professional wrestling. That's not being egotistical, that's stating the truth.

All of these factors played into the fact that once I got booked in Japan, I had been seasoned enough to be granted a spot right at the top. If I had been given that chance earlier in my career, I very likely would have had to climb the ladder in Japan, like most everyone else has to do, before reaching the top level. All of the blood, guts and hard work translated into blockbuster success with SMASH for me, when the "right" time came to fruition.

As Triple H has poignantly pointed out in the past, every successful top name professional wrestler is driven by a large ego. That is not to say those who succeed are egomaniacs, instead they have an ego that demands that they produce to live up to what they require of themselves. Reaching and then maintaining a set standard is what it's all about. Knowing your own, personal piece of business, you gimmick or your deal, whatever it is that brings you to the pay window. When you are given the ball, will you drop it or carry it to the finish line?

> **SMASH has grown at a tremendous rate in Japan, rising like the proverbial phoenix over the past year. The outlook for 2011 is incredibly bright, and I am truly blessed to be a part of making history happen with this great team of professionals.**

At SMASH.10 on November 22, 2010, I was part of the biggest house in company history to date at Tokyo's JCB Hall, headlining against Tajiri for the FCF Championship. Consistently, SMASH has booked me as a top name in the main or semi-main events of their cards, and during all this time I have had the ride of my life.

At SMASH.12 & 13 this past weekend in Tokyo, I fought some incredible matches against Michael Kovac of Austria and Super Crazy from Mexico. The reception I received from the Japanese fans, and the heat level of the matches themselves, in addition to the angles afterward, were off the charts. Especially my face-off with Takao Omori, who saved Tajiri from my second piledriver at SMASH.13, which had so much tension and heat, that never in all of my years have I been involved in an angle with that level of fan response. It was crazy and beautiful at the same time, like being in a fantasy world where everything clicks and comes together.

In Osaka on January 30, I wrestled the tag team match of my career alongside Hajime

Ohara against Akira Nogami and Tajiri, which had the fans responding to everything we did. And we did not have to do stupid shit like highspots from hell to elicit that response. We offered them a solid, safe and tight old school tag team match that they could believe in, with everyone involved shining like the professionals that they are. Even though Ohara and I downed the babyfaces clean in the middle of the ring, the fans went home happy, because SMASH knows how to do business like no other promotion that I have ever worked for. Indeed, I am not kissing ass when I say that SMASH is the most professional organization I have ever worked for, and it shows.

In closing, the time one is given in the spotlight is special indeed. Everyone who reaches that specific pinnacle of personal achievement should relish that fact and moment.

Me, I'm just happy to be living the dream!

Carpe Diem!

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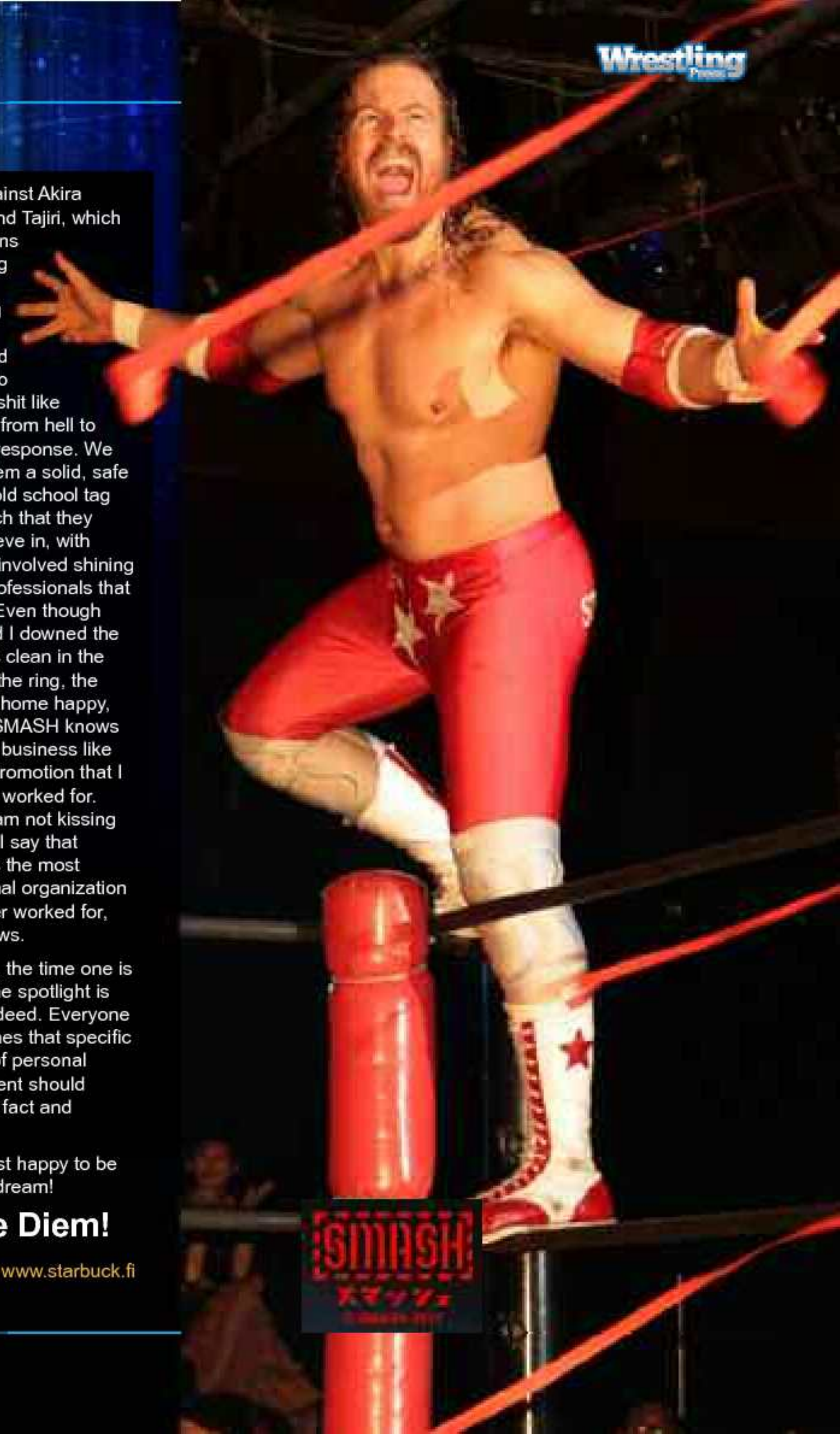

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Words **DAVID SCHMIDA**

wXw 16 Carat Gold Tournament

Every year, Westside Xtreme Wrestling (wXw) gathers sixteen top independent wrestlers in the world to find a winner for their prestigious 16 Carat Gold tournament.

Often in professional wrestling, tournaments are used to give a wrestler the final push towards stardom. Now the argument can be made as to whether or not an independent wrestler can actually reach that aforementioned stardom but it is certain that wXw's 16 Carat Gold weekend gets bigger every year, and that winning the tournament is an accomplishment in its own.

"The first 16 Carat Gold tournament took place in January 2006," Tassilo Jung, one of wXw's owners, told **TWP** shortly before the annual top event. *"It was at this time when US independent wrestling was still really hot, when IWA Mid-South, Pro Wrestling Guerilla (PWG) and Ring of Honor vied for the attention of the fans in Germany with Combat Zone Wrestling and Chikara right behind them.*

"The big US independent tournaments were the events everyone watched. At the very front was the Ted Petty Invitational (IWA Mid-South) followed by the Battle of Los Angeles (PWG). **Our aim had been to attract as many non-mainstream fans as possible. We offered technical wrestling, spot fests, death matches, hardcore wrestling, hard hitting but we had no tournament like that. That's why we put it together."**

Baron von Hagen won the premiere of the tournament beating Murat Bosporus in the finals after being victorious against Doug Williams, Ian Rotten and Iceman in the previous contests. Although von Hagen had to retire only 23 years old due to health issues, Hagen was able to leave his mark after only two and a half years in the ring. Following his victory in the tournament, the two-time wXw Tag Team Champion went on to collect important wins against Ricky Reyes and Go Shiozaki before losing to the Swiss Ares in a

match for wXw's World Heavyweight Championship in September 2006.

"After the change of leadership [at wXw] in 2007, we thought that If we stage a tournament like this, we do it right and make sure that a world class starting field takes part, this will ensure that from this moment onwards one of the top independent tournaments in the world would place in Europe.

> **"The tournament is so popular because we offer exactly that, the top stars from the US Indy scene and the superstars from Japan. Not even the big tournaments in the United States offer that.**

No tournament has such an international approach as the 16 Carat Gold tournament. Add the special atmosphere at wXw (fans stand directly at the ring) to that – you don't find that any other organization worldwide."

Chris Hero won the trophy in 2007 beating Ares in the finals. Also participating were Claudio Castagnoli, Nigel McGuiness, El Generico, Davey Richards, Doug Williams, Pac, Go Shiozaki, Matt Sydal, Ryo Saito, "Bad Bones" John Kay and Murat Bosporus. In a rematch of that year's final, Hero challenged the then reigning World Heavyweight Champion Ares for his title five months later but was beaten by the Swiss after, believe or not, fifty-six minutes.

Another home grown talent captured the tournament victory in 2008. "Bad Bones" John Kay beat Bryan Danielson in the finals after putting away Ares, El Generico and Pierre Carl Oulette in the previous rounds.

Naomichi Marufuji, Doug Williams, Chris Hero, Jimmy Jacobs, Mike Quakenbush and Taiji Ishimori also tried to capture the victory guaranteeing another great starting field. As previous winners received opportunities to win the company's top title, it was no surprise when Kay was granted a spot in the tournament for the vacant World Heavyweight Championship. He beat Claudio Castagnoli in the finals at wXw's 8th Anniversary to win the strap. The

current Tag Team Champion couldn't hold on to the title for long though since he lost it to Bryan Danielson only three months later.

Shingo was the second competitor from overseas to win the 16 Carat Gold tournament. He defeated Drake Younger which meant that had collected his fourth win in his fourth match for wXw. The Japanese star beat Zack Sabre Jr, Tyler Black and Absolute Andy in the previous rounds. Also participating were Bryan Danielson, Daisuke Sekimoto, Erick Stevens, Chris Sabin, Doug Williams and Tatsuhito Takaiwa. Later that year, in October, he clashed again with Absolute Andy for a chance to win wXw's World Heavyweight Title at "Open the German Gate" but lost to the German.

"I think every nationally and internationally recognized success is important for your career," Jung explained. "Chris Hero would have certainly become a superstar without the triumph and Shingo would also be at the top of Dragon Gate without it."

Big Van Walter vs Sekimoto, 15th Jan '11
© Westside Xtreme Wrestling

"But at the same time, they wouldn't be where they are now without any other achievement in independent wrestling in their career. The collection of great matches and the payoff for that in the form of many accomplishments elevated them to where they are now. And the 16 Carat Gold tournament is part of that.

"I also think that a wrestler's standing in Germany is very much influenced by his achievements in wXw and to a little lesser extent at German Stampede Wrestling, because these are two most active organizations which are being followed by the internet fans in Germany. Therefore they are the opinion makers. Subsequently it certainly helps your career to win the biggest tournament in Europe"

The Austrian colossus Big Van Walter had debuted for wXw in May 2007 at the second edition of the tournament, although he didn't actually compete in the 16 carat gold tournament itself. While he lost to Ares in the first round of the 2008 edition and after advancing to the second round in 2009, he was able to win last year's tournament beating Chris Hero in the finals.

Once again wXw put together an international starting field with Claudio Castagnoli, Kagetora, Johnny Kidd, Martin Stone, Yuji Okabayashi, Paul Tracey, Matt Jackson, Erick Stevens, Munenori Sawa and Daisuke Sekimoto. On October 2nd of the same year, Walter beat Zack Sabre Jr to capture the Unified World Championship; wXw had unified its lightweight and heavyweight titles, but lost the strap in January 2011. To a man he had beaten on his way to win the 16 Carat Gold tournament, Daisuke Sekimoto from Japan.

Every single winner of the tournament has gone on to success in the world of wrestling, with all of them being known far beyond the borders of Germany. Nevertheless the 16 Carat Gold tournament has, as mentioned earlier, a value of its own rather than just being an opportunity to push a wrestler. One question remains though: Where does the winner stand in comparison to wXw's reigning champion?

OF COURSE FANS WANT TO KNOW WHO THE NUMBER ONE REALLY IS....

"The Unified World Champion (previously World Heavyweight Champion) is the best wrestler of the promotion because he beat the last champion. The tournament winner has also proven himself to be the best wrestler over a period of three days, being able to leave a world class starting field behind him.

"In the first two editions of the tournament the World Champion took part in the tournament, now a World Title match is one of the highlights of the framework program. Consequently the winner of the tournament and the world champion are different people. Of course fans want to know who the number one really is.

"They want to know if the tournament winner is able to beat the champion and vice versa. Consequently once a year we have this big singles match."

Not only has the tournament helped to influence careers but also the financial success of wXw since it has been constantly growing since 2006 drawing a total of 1500 fans in 2010. What does the future hold for the three-day event?

"The venue could certainly hold more than 500 spectators a day. But the wXw-concept doesn't. Because of the fact the fans are standing around the ring the sight is affected at a certain point. And we want to avoid that.

"Therefore the 2010 edition reached its pinnacle regarding the number of spectators it can currently hold. We want to continue to offer exactly what we offer since 2007: THE top event and tournament in Europe with interesting participants and fantastic matches.

"The success of the tournament with its attendance numbers and the following DVD sales is one of the main drivers of the economical success of Westside Xtreme Wrestling as a whole."

wXw 16 Carat Gold Tournament 2011 Results

The New Horror" Sami Callihan defeated the previous year's winner Big Van Walter in the finals of this year's tournament to capture the trophy. He had put away Tommy End, Yoshihito Sasaki and Davey Richards on his way to the finals and will receive his shot at the company's top title later this year. As of right now, it looks like the man he'll have to face will be Daisuke Sekimoto. The Japanese defended the belt three times during the 2011 edition of the tournament beating "Bad Bones" John Kay, Johnny Moss and El Generico.

Once again the weekend was a great success for wXw as the company was able draw a total 1500 fans again while setting a new attendance record for a Friday.

Contact David at dschmida@hotmail.com

EXOTIC WRESTLER CHICA YEYE STEPS UP TO HELP DARK KITTY

This interview was done when Chica Yeye came to help Dark Kitty with intensive training to help Kitty make her dream come true. Chica Yeye came from another state voluntarily knowing he could assist in helping this young wrestler. A tight bond between the two wrestlers came about after spending a few hours together and seeing the heart each of them have for the sport of professional wrestling.

When did you start wrestling?
June 27, 2007 in the sports center of Salvatirra Guanajuato

What and/or who influenced you most to wrestle?
My friends got me into wrestling but also a love relationship that I was in love with a wrestler.

How has wrestling changed your life?
I think it made me feel that I was more capable to do things I might not have done if not a wrestler from all my wrestling partners because they are the ones that make me have good moments

What is so special about this sport to you?
Definitely the Fans are

What other sports or hobbies do you have an interest in?
I like to help people because other tan wrestling I am a nurse.

What would you do to make the sport better?
I think the best thing to make the sport better would be for all wrestlers to train more and make their moves to perfection

What are your favorite foods, music, clothes, cars etc.?
My favorite food is spagetti, music done by Shakira, clothes anything that looks cute, cars I like them all

What would make you most happy in life?
To see myself improve in everything I do

Who and what are your fans like?
My largest group of fans is from San Luis Potosi, Salvatierra and La Piedad. Love you all and thank you for everything.

Describe a typical day of wrestling training for you?
Intensed, tiring, and most of all fun

What is most important and what are the things you train on most?
You never stop learning something in wrestling so it's very important to keep up with everything new that comes along.

What are your best holds, pins, moves?
My personal best are the arches

What are you best known for doing?
Show, throwing kisses, glamour, sensuality, and my presense.

What was the worst you have ever been hurt in

training or a match.
When I fractured my hand when my partner jumped from the top of a two story house and landed on my hand

Where have you wrestled?
Salamanca, Irapuato, Acambaro, Apaseo el alto, Comonfort, Tangancicuaro, San Luis Potosi, Guadalajara, La Piedad and Zapote.

What titles have you held?
I have not gained a title as of yet but looking forward to winning my first title

What comments or reaction do you get from others about being a wrestler.
That I am a crazy wrestler and that one day I will get hurt.

In your opinion, what are your thoughts on women participating in the sport?
They deserve all the respect and that is the type of wrestling I like to watch the most.

What is your greatest regret?
I have no regrets in my wrestling career

What is your most marked characteristic?
I am an exótico and the sensuality is one of the most important parts of the wrestler I portray.

What is your personal motto?
Be proud to be who you are and not how you should be

What is your most memorable moment?
The applaus and people greeting me by name

What would you do if you couldn't be in wrestling?
I would be working at a hospital helping the people that need my help

How would you describe yourself? ... Attitude, personality, likes, dislikes, strength?
I am a very friendly person, a good friend, noble, and sweet to only the people that deserve my kindness. I like that people are honest and I don't like jealously and egotistical people.

Other comments or information you might want to add?
This would be everything: Always remember Chica Yeye is an exotic wrestler who is sexy and fun. Kisses to all!!!

■ **Contact Dark Kitty at medianoche@corp.paltalk.com**

The year ahead so far (Part 1)

Words: **MATT SINGH**

Thus far 2011 has already been a huge year for the UFC; the first pay-shot of the year, UFC 125: Resolution, pulled a strong 270,000-300,000 pay-per-view buys headlined by a low-key Frank Edgar versus Grey Maynard lightweight title fight.

Following that UFC 126, main evented by Anderson Silva knocking out Vitor Belfort to defend his middleweight title with a co-main event of Forest Griffin defeating Rich Franklin via unanimous decision drew around 750,000 buys. From there, the UFC made its second trip to Australia for UFC 127 on February 27th, with BJ Penn and Jon Fitch fighting to a majority draw. For UFC 127, the company pulled 18, 186 fans paying a record Australian gate of $3,500,000, and early estimates pegged the number of buys in the 300,000 range, a great number considering said weak line-up.

Randy Couture
© Gage Skidmore

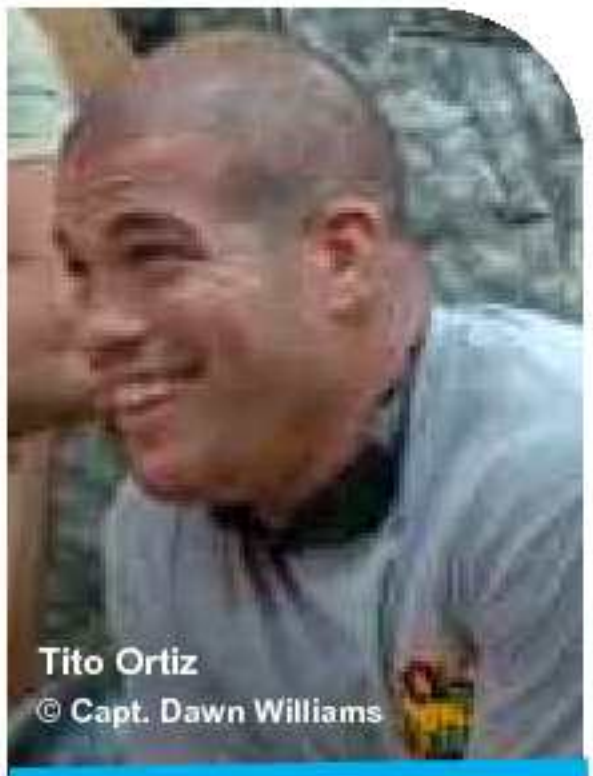
The biggest news however in the first three months of 2011 was the fact the UFC sold a whopping 55,000 tickets resulting in an estimated $11 million gate to its UFC 129 show in Toronto's Rogers Center, headlined by Georges St Pierre defending his welterweight title against number one contender Jake Shields on April 30th. It's almost universally agreed that the UFC 129 show will draw upwards of one million pay-per-view buys, as event though the main card isn't hugely stacked (GSP Vs. Shields and Randy Couture Vs. Lyoto Machida are the only money fight in the main card), fans will buy the show simply to enjoy the mass of people in Rogers Center and the general aura of the first UFC dome/stadium show.

Barring injuries, 2011 should probably be a record breaking year for the UFC on pay-per-view, with almost a handful of million-dollar pay-per-view fights potentially on schedule. One of the biggest pay-per-view buyrates of the year will be drawn by Brock Lesnar taking on Junior Dos Santos on June 11th, at Rogers Arena in Vancouver, Canada, as the two heavyweight will clash as a result of their coaching stints on 'The Ultimate Fighter 13'.

Lesnar is the biggest star the UFC has, drawing over one million PPV buys twice in a year in 2010 (the only combat sports fighter to do so since Mike Tyson in 1996), and is on a comeback trail after losing to the UFC heavyweight title to Cain Velasquez last October at UFC 121 (the show drew 1,050,000 buys), while Junior Dos Santos is the number one ranked heavyweight who was set to fight Velasquez earlier until reigning champion Velasquez sustained an injury.

Lesnar/JDS is already being talked about as a one-million dollar-plus buyrate pay-per-view, yet the only fight officially announced thus far is the main event of Lesnar/JDS, but when one considers that fellow heavyweights Cheick Kongo and Shane Carwin are expected to fight at UFC 131 (probably against one another), then it seems a certainty that UFC 131 will pull one of, if not the biggest, PPV number of the year. The reason UFC 131 may not pull the biggest PPV number of the year is due to the fact that the winner of Lesnar/JDS will receive a heavyweight title fight with Cain Velasquez towards the end of the year.

If Lesnar gets past JDS, then that would of course set up a rematch with Velasquez and again almost certainly mean another million dollar-plus fight, considering their first fight drew over one million purchases. Even if JDS beats Lesnar gets the title show instead, with the UFC heavyweight division on fire at the moment it's almost guaranteed that JDS/Velasquez would also pull north of one million PPV buys.



Tito Ortiz
© Capt. Dawn Williams

....STILL A BIG STAR DESPITE THE POOR RECENT RECORD

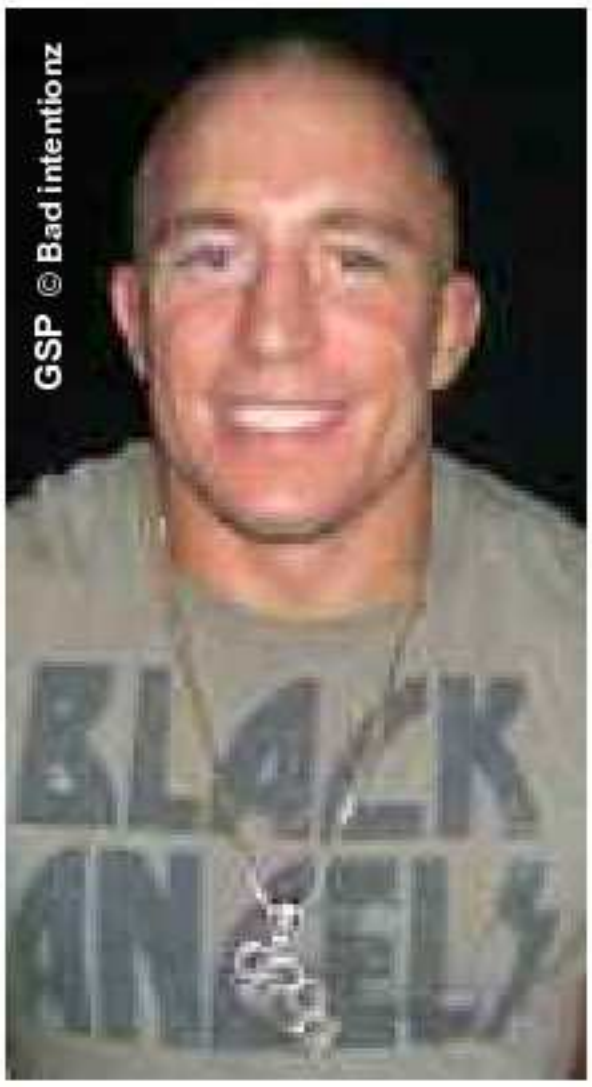
It's not just on pay-per-view where the UFC is making record-breaking sums of money, as 'UFC Fight Night 24', originally headlined by Tito Ortiz versus Antonio Rogerio Nogueira, now headlined by Nogueira versus Phil Davis, in for an injured Ortiz, has sold around 13,000 tickets, an amazing number considering all none-pay-per-view shows are considered 'B' shows that routinely draw less than 5,000 fans. While that number is slightly less impressive when factoring-in that those fans buying tickets did so with the main event of Tito Ortiz (still a big star despite the poor recent record) versus Nogueira, the fact remains that UFC attendance across the board will probably, like gate revenue, break records in 2011.

As well as heading to Australia for the second time this year, the UFC will travel to Brazil to stage its first pay-per-view event in the country since the Zuffa buy-out in August when the UFC runs the HSBC Arena in Rio De Janeiro. The last time the UFC ran a Brazil show was in October 1998 under the ownership of SEG, and with Brazilian star fighters such as Jose Aldo (UFC featherweight champion), Anderson Silva (middleweight champion), Lyoto Machida (former UFC light heavyweight champion) and Antonio 'Minotauro' Nogueira (former UFC heavyweight champion) the UFC should have no problems whatsoever selling-out the 18,000-capacity HSBC arena in the summer.

In a continuation of booking bigger arenas for their 'B' shows, the UFC has planned for its 'UFC On Versus 5' event to be held at the Bradley Center in Milwaukee, on August 14th, and while no fights have been announced yet, it's almost a certainty that the

event will draw close to the 18,000 capacity that the Bradley Center can hold.

The interesting thing however about the 'B' shows, is that while the live attendance may be rising, but it appears the television numbers for the small shows are slowly falling; despite the fact that the latest small show, 'UFC Live; Sanchez Vs. Kampmann' on March 3rd, drew a record 'small-show' 8,319 fans with fans paying a $471,450 gate, the show drew a 0.7 rating, one of the lowest of all-time for the UFC since the Zuffa buyout ten years ago.



Of course, one of the biggest fights of the year, and of all time, could be the dream fight of Georges St Pierre versus Anderson Silva for Silva's middleweight title later this year, providing GSP beats number one welterweight contender Jake Shields at UFC 129 at the end of April. If GSP does indeed get past Shields (and GSP is the heavy favourite to do so), then a fight between the two most dominate fighters on the planet current and of all time is almost certainly going to be booked probably towards the end of the year. If indeed GSP versus Silva does happen, the buyrate and live gate is almost unfathomable when one considers that the live gate for GSP versus Jake Shields, who is nowhere near the star Silva is, totalled around $11 million.

The pay-per-view buys and gate receipts are sure to break the all-time UFC records, held currently by the UFC 100 buyrate of 1.7 million buys, and the aforementioned record UFC 129 gate. The location for the dream GSP/Silva fight are threefold; either a second event at the Rogers Center in Toronto, Cowboys Stadium in Texas with a capacity of anywhere between 80,000-100,000 or HSBC Arena is Rio De Janeiro on the first ever UFC-Zuffa show in August.

The latter option is the unlikely however, as GSP fights Shields in April and even though four months may seem like a long time between fights, when you factor-in fight promotion, training time and maybe even a sting on 'The Ultimate Fighter' reality show as coaches (there are no plans currently for that to happen, but things could change), it's more likely that the GSP/Silva will in the last quarter of 2011 at either Rogers Center or Cowboys Stadium. For GSP/Silva to happen though, the Canadian welterweight needs to get past Jake Shields which will by no means be an easy task as Shields bested Dan Henderson via decision in his last StrikeForce fight and then beat Martin Kampmann via decision in his first UFC fight to earn the title shot against GSP at UFC 129 in April at Rogers Center.

If Shields beats GSP, he'll have beaten one of the best fighters of all time and capture the UFC welterweight title, but unintentionally derailed one, if not the, biggest fights of all time, as if GSP falls to Shields it'll be difficult, if not impossible, to justify giving GSP a middleweight title shot at Silva after coming off a welterweight division loss (and a title-losing loss at that). So essentially, the biggest fight of all-time (certainly in the UFC) all hangs on whether or not GSP can beat Shields at UFC 129 on April 30th.

Contact Matt at mattsingh33@gmail.com

To be continued in **TWP** Issue 14 out April 28th.

DIVA

MADISON RAYNE

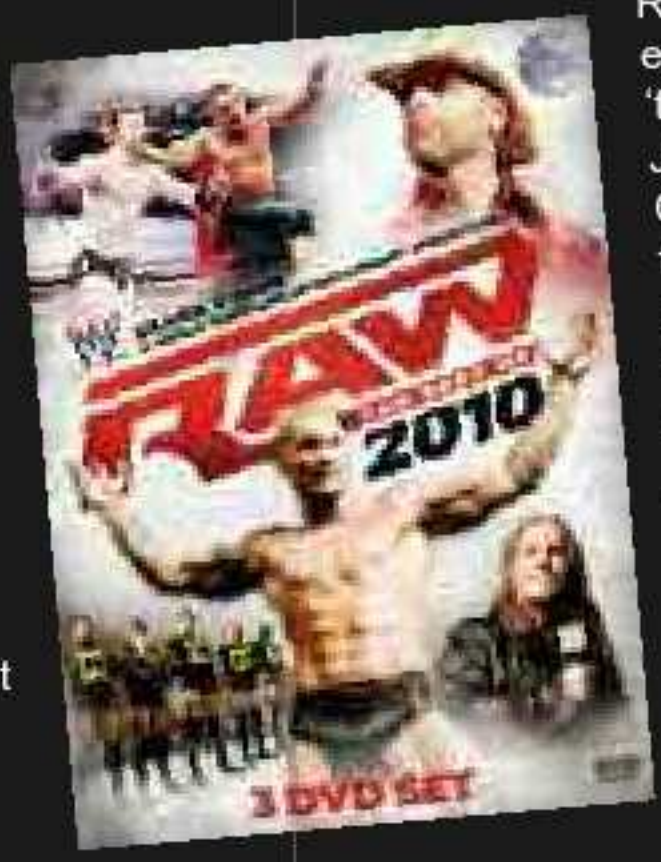
Photo: TNA Wrestling

DVD

Best of Raw 2010

2010 was a big year in WWE, the release of this 3-disc DVD set runs through the most memorable moments and matches of the year. But does it do it justice?

It's good to see an increasing number of concept DVD's by WWE and I was looking forward to this, it's always great to see a year in retrospective. Much like 2009 we find ourselves once again with a 3 disc set lasting 9 hours of what should promise to be the best segments and matches throughout 2010.



With so much content on the DVD I'll skim over the over all good and bad points.

The main question for me was if WWE could execute all the goodies properly into one DVD set? Sadly, I noticed right away that it leaves a lot of key moments in the year out and includes matches that I didn't really care for the first time around.

Granted, it was pretty late in the year but the TLC match with Jerry Lawler and Miz for example was nowhere to be seen. Bret Hart's United States title victory was also missing – A pretty big deal to leave out don't you think? Also Bret Hart's segments he shared with Vince aren't included as chapters and the break up of Legacy gets little to no attention.

A lot of matches are joined in progress, this is because the matches were shown during the live broadcast of Raw, where TV commercials were placed. This gets really annoying and makes matches short. Also the highlight videos that are shown at the beginning of each month sometimes give away the finishes to matches, so if you want to remain surprised I recommend you skip these bits.

On the plus side it's great to re-live what were to be the last matches of DX and Shawn Michaels. Of course the farewell speech from Shawn Michaels on the Raw after Wrestlemania are timeless memories and it may be worth getting the DVD just for the moments leading up to the departure of HBK.

Reliving the rise of the Nexus is enjoyable, as is the battle for 'the face of the WWE' between John Cena and Batista. Seeing Cena backed into a corner vs. the Nexus was probably one of the most enjoyable and unpredictable segments of the year.

All in all, this DVD comes down to a case of how much you as a fan enjoyed 2010, these days to relive your favourite moments you simply have to log on to youtube and type a few key words. But if you are a dedicated modern day WWE fan however, then this is of course the perfect purchase for you.

As mentioned earlier it may get a little frustrating at times to see bits left out and matches given away. But at the end of the day what can you expect from the longest running episodic TV series that WWE has to offer? To be fair there's a hell of a lot of content to cover and even after the jam-packed 9-hour DVD, WWE are bound to have missed out some content.

For what it's worth you might as well enjoy this DVD for the comprehensive content that it does provide for fans in what was certainly a huge year for WWE.

ANDY SHARP

DVD

WWE Top 50 Greatest Superstars Of All Time

Supplier: Silvervision // Price: £17.99
Discs: 3 // Run Time: 8 hours 28 minutes

When this DVD was announced it seemed like a very good idea however, since the list of the 50 greatest superstars in of all time was leaked onto the internet before the DVD's release there has been a lot of controversy surrounding the 50 picks and it would seem the dubiousness surrounding the list is for good reason.

There are indeed some dubious choices most notably some of the more obvious contenders for the top spot rank in the teens and even in the twenties, while some admittedly very talented though less significant wrestlers rank higher.

The viewer is not told what the criteria are for the selection choices, all we're really told is that they were chosen by the current roster of WWE superstars. Now going by some selection choices it would have been good if a certain criteria were put in place for this. So at least the rankings could have been explained a little more, without some sort of explanation there really does seem to be no rhyme nor reason to this.

This really is just a greatest hits package, showing some excellent clips from years gone by but nothing else. It doesn't really delve into the superstars' career; it merely brushes over every superstar in the top 50, meaning there's nothing ground-breaking to really make a note of. There's also some nice input from wrestler's old and new giving their opinions on who they liked in the business and why which is a nice touch.

Throughout the DVD, we did have to wonder, if some of the rankings were affected by certain wrestlers' decisions to leave the WWE at different points in their careers. Which does makes you think what the selection choices might have been if this list were completely honest.

Discs 2 and 3 of this collection are really where this set truly comes alive, these two discs feature a fantastic selection of bonus matches and its likely that this content will appease fans more than the feature itself.

While it would have been nice to see earlier decades represented a little more heavily than they are here, there's still a very strong selection of bouts showcasing the talents of many of the fifty featured in the main attraction.

Say what you will about the rankings and their validity, but this is still a fun set with some great clips and in places some interesting information is provided. What must be remembered is very few people are going to agree on who the all-time best really is, and while there are some rather glaring mistakes here, there are also some very good solid choices.

The collection of matches on the final two discs is worth the purchase of this DVD alone, some classic matches that definitely helps round off this DVD set very well, one for the collection indeed.

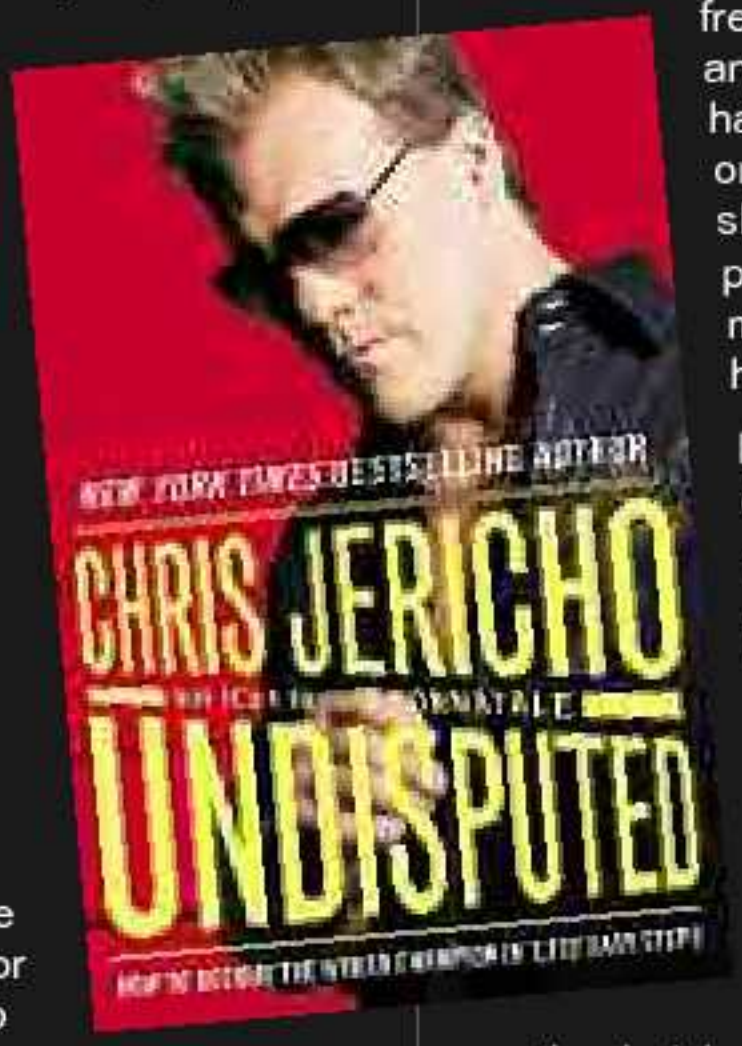
DARREN WOOD

BOOK

Undisputed: How to Become the World Champion in 1,372 Easy Steps

By Chris Jericho, Peter Thomas Fornatale

After much anticipation from his debut book: A Lions Tale, Chris Jericho's latest book release: Undisputed: How to Become the World Champion in 1,372 Easy Steps picks up exactly where we left off in the previous instalment, with the countdown clock ticking down to zero marking Chris Jericho's debut in the WWE.



This time around the book seems to be more targeted at long-term wrestling fans who are guaranteed to have an enjoyable read from cover to cover. Basically, it helps if you are fluent in the language of wrestling and have a certain degree of familiarity with names in the business. However, even for those who aren't exactly up to speed Jericho will keep you entertained.

If Jericho had never made it as a wrestler or a rock star he could have easily found a suitable career as a writer. His style of writing and consistent witty sense of humour makes the book very addictive, and you will soon (if you haven't already) become a Jerichoholic.

The book will give you plenty of laughs, but on the flipside it also has its serious topics. Undisputed provides fans with the most candid experience shared from someone who was right in the eye of the storm regarding the Chris Benoit tragedy. Jericho doesn't hold anything back and after reading it from the perspective of someone who was so close to Benoit it makes the whole situation a lot more tragic.

With so many wrestling biographies being released since Mick Foley started the trend it's easy to say that perhaps the appeal has been watered down, but Jericho freshens up the whole sub-genre and I recommend those who have read A Lions Tale continue on this journey that Jericho has shared. He gives a back stage pass into the wrestling world more than perhaps anyone else has done to date.

No major criticisms really stand out in this book; naturally as it's a sequel it has the pressure of living up to the original, but for me both books kind of morph into one another. If I had to picky though I might have to admit that A Lions Tale is only slightly more enjoyable, because as the saying goes: 'The thrill is in the chase' originally we were following the Jericho who was trying to accomplish his dream. With Undisputed we have the Jericho who has realised his dream, but it's still a damn good dream to read about.

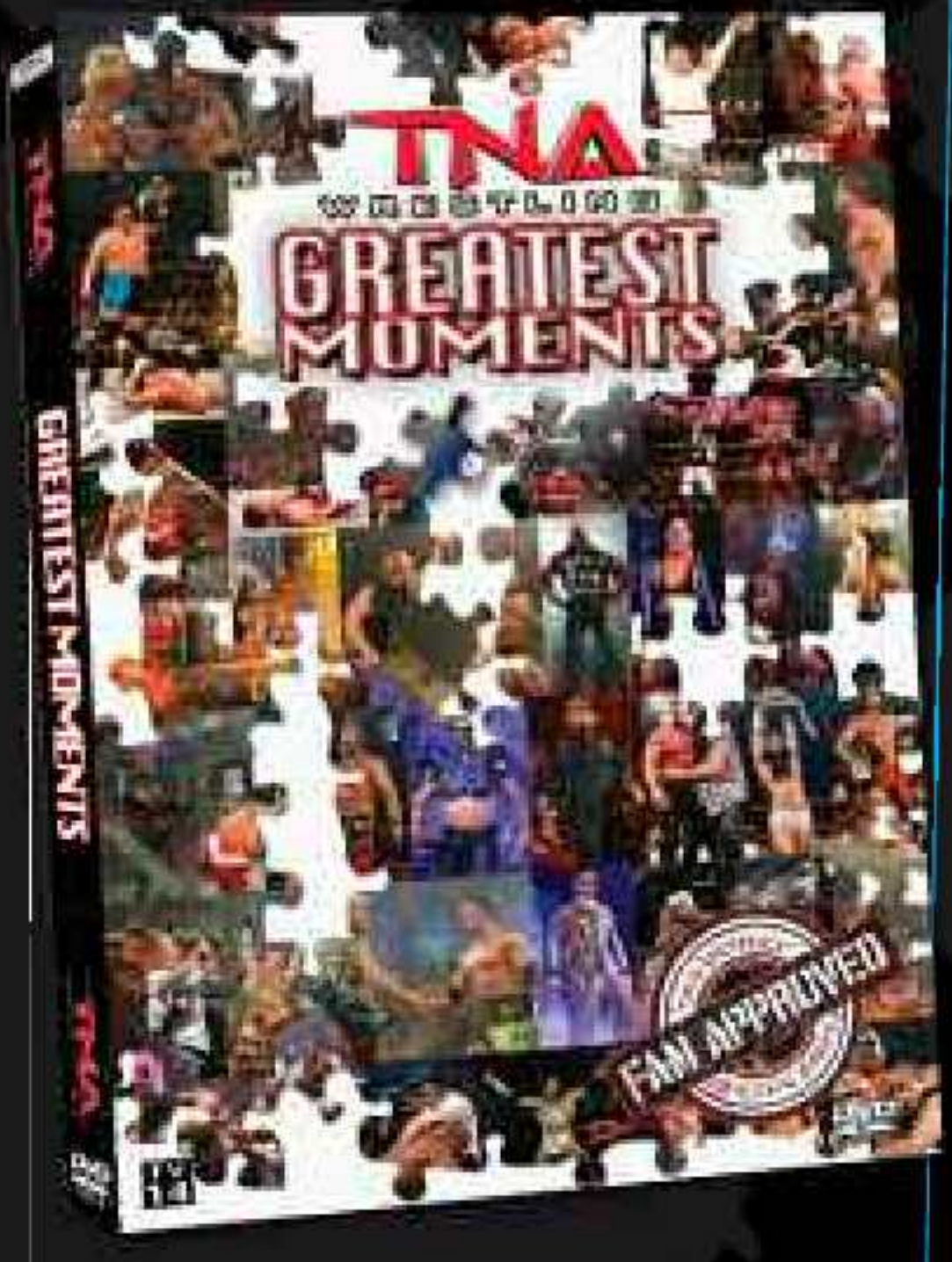
Just like the first book, this sequel belongs on the bookshelf of any wrestling fan past or present.

ANDY SHARP

DVD

TNA Wrestling Greatest Moments

Supplier: TNA Wrestling // No. of discs: 1
Runtime: 180 minutes // Price: £12.29



This latest DVD release from TNA Wrestling looks back at their Greatest Moments. A nice idea by the company, however this title only covers their recent history from 2007 up to Hardcore Justice 2010 which took place last August.

Split into six chapters the DVD starts with the arrival of The Immortal Hulk Hogan to TNA, this unfortunately includes the Hogan/Abyss vs Flair/Styles tag team debacle, a greatest moment? Not in our book.

Other chapters include debuts in TNA Wrestling, TNA stars capturing championship belts, the top 10 moments in TNA history voted by the fans plus much more.

Most of the interviews in the DVD are in kayfabe, which is a disappointment but some are very honest and make for good viewing.

While watching this DVD I realised that this isn't meant to be for fans that are already familiar with TNA. With no complete matches and hardly any complete segments it can get very annoying if you know TNA, it is meant for fans that are not familiar with TNA and have missed out on the past three years.

At over three hours long, the DVD features some great moments and features lots of match endings, tons of promos but with only two full matches this title is a let down.

TNA Wrestling have produced some great DVD's such as the Asylum Years and the History of TNA Year 1 so I thought TNA Wrestling's Greatest Moments was going to be another great DVD, however I was wrong which was a shame.

Hardcore TNA fans will probably want to have it in the collection and casual fans will enjoy it. I wouldn't recommend it though, thumbs down.

DARREN WOOD

DVD

Dragon Gate UK: Invasion 2

It would be fair to say that Japanese promotion, Dragon Gate, are showing a real incentive to creating new fans both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Dubbing each respective branch of their company "Dragon Gate USA" and "Dragon Gate UK" really gives a local flavour to proceedings; helped by the fact that the promotion makes use of a lot of home grown talent from the countries they hold their shows.

This DVD offering takes in the group as they roll through the Burgess Civic Hall in St. Ives, Cambridgeshire on September 11th 2010 as part of the UK Invasion tour.

The first thing to note would be the lovely job the event crew did of setting up the venue. Simply put, it looks highly appealing and serves as a lovely backdrop to the in-ring chaos which ensues. It's also nice to have optional commentary to narrate the proceedings, with the chance to turn this off completely and have nothing but the ambience of the event as it was in person. Both options certainly give a different flavour, with announcer "Irish Stew" Allan doing a great job of describing the Dragon Gate product to newcomers.

Of course, firm fans of Dragon Gate will be mainly interested to know what the in-ring action is like. Needless to say, no-one will be disappointed here.

The opener between Cyber Kong and UK performer, Marty Scurll is a slow burner which represents the card as a whole – one which plays out naturally from curtain jerker to main event. It's important to note that in the next match, Lion Kid gives an impressive showing against "Open The Dream Gate" champion, Masato Yoshino. Much like his fellow Brit Scurll, the Kid gives a good account of himself against such an established name.

In true Dragon Gate tradition, any one of the last 3 matches could have rightfully laid claim to closing out the show. This trio of showcase bouts are the meat of the package and are definitely worth the price of admission alone.

Susumu Yokosuka and Masaaki Mochizuki are up first with a match dripping in history, dating back to the Toryumon promotion – the preceding company to Dragon Gate. The story here is Yokosuka and his attempt to beat his former partner and stable mate, Mochizuka for the very first time. However, the fans in attendance are treated to some excellent comedy spots which only serve to heighten the intense action near the match conclusion.

Dragon Gate mainstay's BxB Hulk and Naruki Doi are up next as they square off against Yamato and the sinister Shingo. This tag war shows just how fun tag-team action can be, never once looking like slowing down. Again, this match could have headlined the entire event.

The match which does take the main event slot fully deserves it. British grapple artists, Mark Haskins and "Open The Brave Gate" champion, Pac face off against aerial specialist Dragon Kid and his partner for the evening, CIMA. The moves on display here will leave you breathless.

Between the red-hot crowd, enthusiastic in-ring performances from all involved and a real eagerness to entertain from the Dragon Gate boys, the level of entertainment on display here is fantastic. Indeed, this show feels like a celebration of all that is right in the world of professional wrestling. There are better examples of the high-flying, intense action Dragon Gate provides, but overall this DVD is a tremendous package.

JAMIE KENNEDY

DVD

Ring of Honor: Tag Title Classic II

Taking place the night before the event Ring of Honor would probably consider to be their biggest of the year, Final Battle, ROH Tag Title Classic II is a sure-fire hit amongst the ROH fan base. Indeed, Tag Title Classic II is best viewed alongside the aforementioned Final Battle super show, as all the bouts and storylines are then in context. On its own merits however, this show is certainly one which cranks up the dial in terms of entertainment and there's a lot to enjoy.

The emphasis of this event seems to be on the promotion attempting to secure their future by building up wrestlers they consider to be just that. Judging by the hot trio of opening matches, that future is extremely bright. Adam Cole and Kenny King are first out and put on a fantastic opener in which it was clear that their styles mixed well. This one set the tone well for the rest of the card and it's obvious from this performance that Kenny King will someday be an ROH World Champion, the hardcore fans of the company obviously covet him.

Relative newcomer, "The Prodigy" Mike Bennett faces off against the ever-popular, Colt Cabana in a short but sweet contest before Andy "Right Leg" Ridge attempts to get the first win of his 5 match trial series by taking on "The Fallen Angel" Christopher Daniels in a well-received effort, during which Daniels did his utmost to make Ridge become an accepted part of the Ring of Honor roster.

Also on offer is a tag team contest between Steve Corino & Kevin Steen vs. The Briscoe Brothers. This one starts out as a wild brawl before settling into itself and turning out to be a lively tag encounter, during which Corino and Steen draw great heat from the noisy crowd in Plymouth, MA.

A 4-corner survival match pitting El Generico vs. Rhett Titus vs. Ricky Reyes vs. Grizzly Redwood goes down well and is action packed, while youngsters Kyle O'Reilly and TJ Perkins provoke a polite reaction from the audience for their quick and snappy exchanges in singles competition.

ROH World Champion, Roderick Strong tangles with ex-TNA talent, Sonjay Dutt in an excellent non-title bout. Dutt looks comfortable inside the ring with men who can match his athleticism and it's exciting to see him let loose here.

Without doubt the deserving headliner, The American Wolves vs. The Kings of Wrestling for the ROH World Tag Team Titles is the reason why most fans will want to check out this DVD. Facing off for the 1st time ever, these teams leave it all in the ring and end the show on a high note with some utterly astounding wrestling action. It's hard to fathom just how these guys can go at this pace night in and night out and they truly deserve the standing ovation following the match conclusion. The excitement is palpable towards the climax of this one and you won't want to miss out.

While it would be fair to say that many fans of the promotion would be able to point to better cards, Ring of Honor have put out a great product here. The satisfaction of the main event sitting atop a packed under-card makes this a worthwhile purchase. Despite major-league outfits such as WWE showing distinct disinterest in the tag scene, tag team wrestling in North America is far from dead. Infact, it's alive and well.

JAMIE KENNEDY

DVD

Catch Wrestling Norddeutschland: CWN in Norderstedt – Die Rückkehr

Run time: 1 hour 41 minutes // Discs: one
Price: 15 Euros
Distributor: Catch Wrestling Norddeutschland (www.catchwrestling.de)

Since the DVD doesn't offer much of a menu or an intro, we jump right into the first match. Axel Dieter Jr. met with the Irish Paul Tracey. Both exchange some beautiful chain wrestling as well as some very entertaining holds on the mat while Tracey gradually increased his heel role and even insulted the referee in German.

Mark Andrews from Wales celebrated his debut in Germany in an elimination tag rules match against Pierre, Da Mack and El Alligator Blanco. Very good contrast to the opener with a lot of action you expect from a four-way cruiserweight bout highlighted by Andrews' Shooting Star Press and the finish of the contest.

Up next was the encounter between Masterpiece Marsellus and Drake Younger from the United States in a No Barbed Wire Ropes match. Marsellus is not the most athletic and agile wrestler but to my surprise, Younger pulled him to a pretty enjoyable match. Younger even brought a Christmas present for his opponent, which involved some wax and Marsellus' hairy back.

The following tag team bout between Karsten Beck teaming with Big Van Walter against Farmer Joe and Michael Isotov involved a little too much comedy. Although I have to say that seeing Beck ax-handle-blowing an apple brought to the ring by Farmer Joe was quite amusing. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, sometimes they overdo it in wrestling and it was the case in this encounter but it didn't last too long.

It was time for the main event. The Swiss Ares returned to CWN for the first time in more than two years. The man who currently dominates Chikara together with his allies from the "Bruderschaft des Kreuzes", squared off against the fan favorite "Bad Bones" John Kay. Kay showed some very unique techniques here, using the children in the audience to weaken his adversary while brawling outside the ring. Don't worry they're fine and really seemed to enjoy being used as a "weapon". A fair handshake finished off a good event.

Although the DVD offers only five matches and no bonus features, this event was very well worth watching with its good variety of matches.

DAVID SCHMIDA

DVD

UFC 121

Supplier: Clearvision.co.uk // Price: £10.99
Discs: 2 // Run Time: 5 hours 3 minutes

Coming into UFC 121 Brock Lesnar was arguably the biggest draw in the UFC, Cain Velasquez was arguably the biggest Hispanic draw. So with the two facing off in the main event, this card was always going to feel like a hugely important show.

The outcome of the match, whichever way it was to swing was always going to show the direction UFC would head afterward. When all was said and done, the outcome leaves almost as many questions as it gives answers.

Elsewhere on the card, we have some great performances from Tom Lawlor, Brendan Schaub and Matt Hamil, and handful of other highly enjoyable matches too. The extras included in the DVD is the same we're used too, interviews, behind the scenes looks and some of the build up too, which is usually fantastic.

Don't get me wrong, this is all entertaining and a great companion to the main show. But for the first time it feels like something is missing as UFC had run a special 3 part UFC Prime Time to hype the main event. Whilst snippets are included in the hype videos, it's a shame they didn't include the full thing as there were some truly great parts through the special.

UFC 121 is as enjoyable and collectable as any UFC release, and my minor gripe about the lack of inclusion of the Prime Time special doesn't make this DVD any less of an important piece of any collection than any other DVD, and at just £10.99 it's a great price too for over 5 hours of heavy hitting action.

MARTYN LICCHELLI

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the WrestleMania Experience...

Background picture © John Smolek

WrestleMania 6

by John Milner

Looking back, it seems almost fate that Wrestlemania VI should have happened at the Skydome in 1990. I was in my second year of college, and was close friends with a freshman named Dee. We were both huge wrestling fans, and Dee had been introduced to me by my "next door neighbour" in Residence. They were both from the same hometown of Tillsonburg, Ontario. By April, I don't think it was a mystery to too many people (save Dee herself) that I had quite a crush on her.

At first, actually going to Wrestlemania didn't seem like it was in the cards. Tickets were fairly expensive for two middle-class kids, and the drive to Toronto and back seemed a bit of a trek. And so, it seemed as if we'd just go to a local sports bar, and watch Wrestlemania on their TV, as we had with the Royal Rumble.

That was…until about a week or so before. Dee and I got to talking one night, and managed to talk ourselves into ordering a couple of tickets and going to Wrestlemania VI.

Dee and I had a great time driving up to Toronto. We talked about wrestling and got ourselves excited about the matches we were going to see. The rare "good guy vs. good guy" (we didn't know to call them "faces" in those days) of Hulk Hogan vs. the Ultimate Warrior was the match we were most looking forward to. Dee thought Hogan would retain but I had heard they'd put the belt on the Warrior because he appealed to younger fans.

Seeing the crown at the 'Dome was a lot like seeing the crowd for Wrestlemania III on the big screen…only this was live and we were a part of the over 67,000 fans there that day.

From the moment Rick Martel and Koko B. Ware came out for the "dark match" to the end of show, Dee and I enjoyed ourselves tremendously. It was great to know we'd been part of history when Demolition regained the Tag Team titles. It was fun doing the wave during the Jake Roberts-Ted Dibiase match.

And it was awesome to be there when Dusty Rhodes and Sapphire brought out Elizabeth during their mixed tag match against Randy Savage and Sensational Sherri. In the years since, the WWE has talked a lot about "Wrestlemania moments". At Wrestlemania VI, there seemed to be a lot of them, and Dee and I were proud to be there for all of them.

Nothing prepared me for the moment when Hogan DIDN'T kick out of the Warrior's pin attempt. I kid you not, my jaw just dropped. There it was, World title history, right in front of my eyes. It took me a moment, but then I saw Dee standing up to cheer the new champion, and I quickly joined her.

The trip home was much like the trip in, but amid the heavy metal that Dee rocked her car with back in the day, we talked about the matches, the moments and the history we'd seen. When we arrived back in the Residence, despite the later (or rather early) hour, we were like impromptu rock stars, with everyone wanting to know how we'd enjoyed the show,

what had happened and what adventures we had had along the way. In September 1991, just a couple of weeks after she and I had gone to a WWE show, headlined by her favourite tag team, the Road Warriors, she was killed in a car accident.

Even now, 20 years later, I still think of Dee often, especially when I'm watching wrestling. And every time I see a clip of Hogan-Warrior or any other moment from Wrestlemania VI, I smile, knowing that somewhere out in the crowd, Dee and I are there: two young kids enjoying one of the best times of their lives.

WrestleMania 10 - As I remember it

by RetroJunk.com

As most kids were in the early to mid-90s, I was obsessed with the World Wrestling Federation. I was lured into this culture in 1989 when a man with long blonde hair told me to say my prayers and eat my vitamins (and without questions I ate his brand of vitamins).

I was a Hulkamaniac, and soon after my bedroom looked like the inside of a Retro Fitness Gym. Yellow and red as far as the eye could see.

I will never forget the day when it was announced that the tenth anniversary of WrestleMania would return to where it all began: Madison Square Garden.

BRET HART LOSING TO OWEN TO OPEN THE AFTERNOON WAS A SHOCK....

Being from Long Island I knew that it wouldn't take much to get to the city for the event. I begged, and pleaded with my parents to take me, but I had been told that the tickets were just too expensive, and that we would not be going.

As you do at the age of 7, I began to cry... hysterically. I've lost friends, family members, and pets, and to this day, I dont think I shed as many tears for all of them combined as I did for finding out that there would be no Wrestlemania for me.

Well wouldnt you know it, my mother felt bad for me. She left me in my room in shambles, and came back about a minute later.

She opened her hand, and there they were. Even better: They were RINGSIDE seats. Now I will never win a Super Bowl or a World Series, but I can imagine that the joy I felt was somewhat similar. At the age of 7, I found out that I would be ringside at Wrestlemania 10.

I will never forget that day: March 20th, 1994. I remember me, my father, his friend Joe, and my younger brother hopping on the Long Island Railroad and heading into the city. That trip couldn't have been any slower.

We went to a restaurant before and I remember sitting there, watching tons of people walk in wearing their WrestleMania X t-shirts.

We enter through the turnstiles at the Garden, I am in heaven. My dad takes my brother and me to the merchandise stand. He buys me a hat and a pair of Bret Hart glasses.

We get to the seats and oh yeah, it was sweet. Little Richard came out and sung the worst version of America the Beautiful that I have ever heard. In fact, my brother and I made fun of it the entire day, and still do to this day. Then the matches began.

Bret Hart losing to Owen to open the afternoon was a shock. Little Richard could have walked back to the ring naked, and no one would have been as shocked.

Savage was my favourite now that Hogan was gone, and I had visions of him beating up Crush with my help, that of course didn't happen. I was ecstatic my favourite had won, in his final WrestleMania match. I was glad to have seen it.

The infamous ladder match was the coolest match I have ever seen live. And you can only imagine how cool it was up close. I will never forget the sound that was made when Razor

Ramon gave Shawn Michaels "The Razor's Edge" from the top of that ladder. Holy crap.

I wish I could tell you a lot of this match, but my father wanted to beat the foot traffic on his way out of the building. I remember watching some of it and loving it, then being towed away prematurely. I did get to see Bret win the match from the exits, but then we bolted.

It was an awesome event and I loved every second of it.

WrestleMania 13 - the attitude is building

by Harlin S. Neal

On Sunday, March 23rd, 1997, the World Wrestling Federation would bring its annual spring pay-per-view spectacular event, "WrestleMania" back to one of pro wrestling's favorite cities, Chicago, Illinois. Or more specifically...Rosemont, Illinois, which is a suburb immediately northwest of the Chicago city limits. The Rosemont Horizon, now known as the Allstate Arena, had hosted 1/3 of the 3-city WrestleMania 2 show in 1986. Now Chicago-area wrestling fans could experience the biggest event in the business again...and I was one of the fortunate 18,000-plus in the arena to see it live.

In comparison to other WrestleMania's, I'd say this show wasn't "the greatest of all time", but it definitely had a lot of "WrestleMania Moments". The most talked about moment was the reception of Stone Cold Steve Austin, who's "I don't give a damn" attitude and the proclamation of "Austin 3:16" propelled him to be one of the most popular wrestlers ever. He was cheered louder than he'd been ever cheered in a WWF ring when his "break the glass, and I'll kick your ass" bravado walked through a broken glass pane with "Austin 3:16" shining on it as he entered the ring. His attitude, along with a fired-up crowd, helped Austin last through a grueling "I Quit" match against Bret Hart.

Ironically...Austin's appearance wasn't the loudest pop of the night. That honor went to the Legion of Doom, as they teamed with Ahmed Johnson in a 6-man "street fight" against the Nation of Domination. The L.O.D. always got top pops whenever they performed in their hometown of Chicago. Plus, there were rumors that the legendary tag team was retiring after that match, so seeing that match was all that much more special.

The main event of the night was a no-disqualification match featuring the Undertaker vs. "Psycho" Sid for the WWF Championship. After all the pops for the Austin/Hart and LOD & Johnson/NOD match, there wasn't much left when the main event combatants came to the ring. And most of us in the arena could tell the Undertaker was going to win. From where I sat, I could see the tunnel where the wrestlers came to and left the ring area. Right before the end of the match, I saw purple smoke coming from out of that tunnel...and that was the dead giveaway the Undertaker would beat Sid, and win his 2nd WWF title. The post-match celebration by the Dead Man was anti-climatic at best, and that would end the 2nd WrestleMania card in Chicago, and start a 9-year wait before Wrestlemania returned to the Windy City.

WrestleMania 13 was one of the first WM's to have a corporate sponsor. In this case, it was the Sony PlayStation. There were PlayStation booths set up throughout the arena's concourse. Like other WM's before or since, there were plenty of things to do for fans days before the event. Unlike today's shows, there was no WrestleMania Fan Axxess area per se, but there were events near the arena where fans could interact with wrestlers. Also, there was no Hall of Fame ceremony the night before WrestleMania. But, wrestling legends The Iron Sheik, Bob Backlund, and Rocky Johnson were a part of the card.

My experience to being at my first WrestleMania was a memorable one. Even with today's internet rumors and instant results, it's fun to attend a live WrestleMania show. If you're fortunate enough to live in or near a city that hosts a WrestleMania show and you can get tickets go to it. Even if it's in a domed football stadium like the Georgia Dome, it's still worth your while to go. The card I attended overall wasn't all that great, but being in the arena brings a vibe you can't experience on TV.

Regardless of the size of the venue, WrestleMania will always be the biggest pro wrestling show of the year. Of course, the larger venues provide a Roman Coliseum-style experience that really puts the wrestlers on a pedestal unlike any other.

The idea that wrestlers will perform in front of over 75,000 fans in Atlanta this April is daunting for anyone. While it's more common for such shows to take place in larger-than-life locations one thing's for sure the Rosemont Horizon helped usher in the WWF's "Attitude Era" in the spring of 1997 with its pinnacle show.

I'm delighted to say that this wrestling fan was fortunate enough to be one of over 18,000 people in that building to see it happen first-hand.

WrestleMania's 18, 23 and 26

by Aaron Wolf

I have been privileged to attend three separate WrestleMania events. The first show I attended was the 18th installment of the "Grand day of them all" which was held in Toronto, Ontario Canada.

It took about four hours to get to the arena and while not recalling the actual costs I can say it was expensive.

The excitement of Wrestlemania 18 for me was the atmosphere, it was electric. The Hogan Rock Match was a highlight and I really had no clue who to root for so I Kind of chanted for both.

The WWE Fan Axxess was great and I met a lot of awesome wrestlers and got autographs Goldust gave me a high five but Mr. Perfect

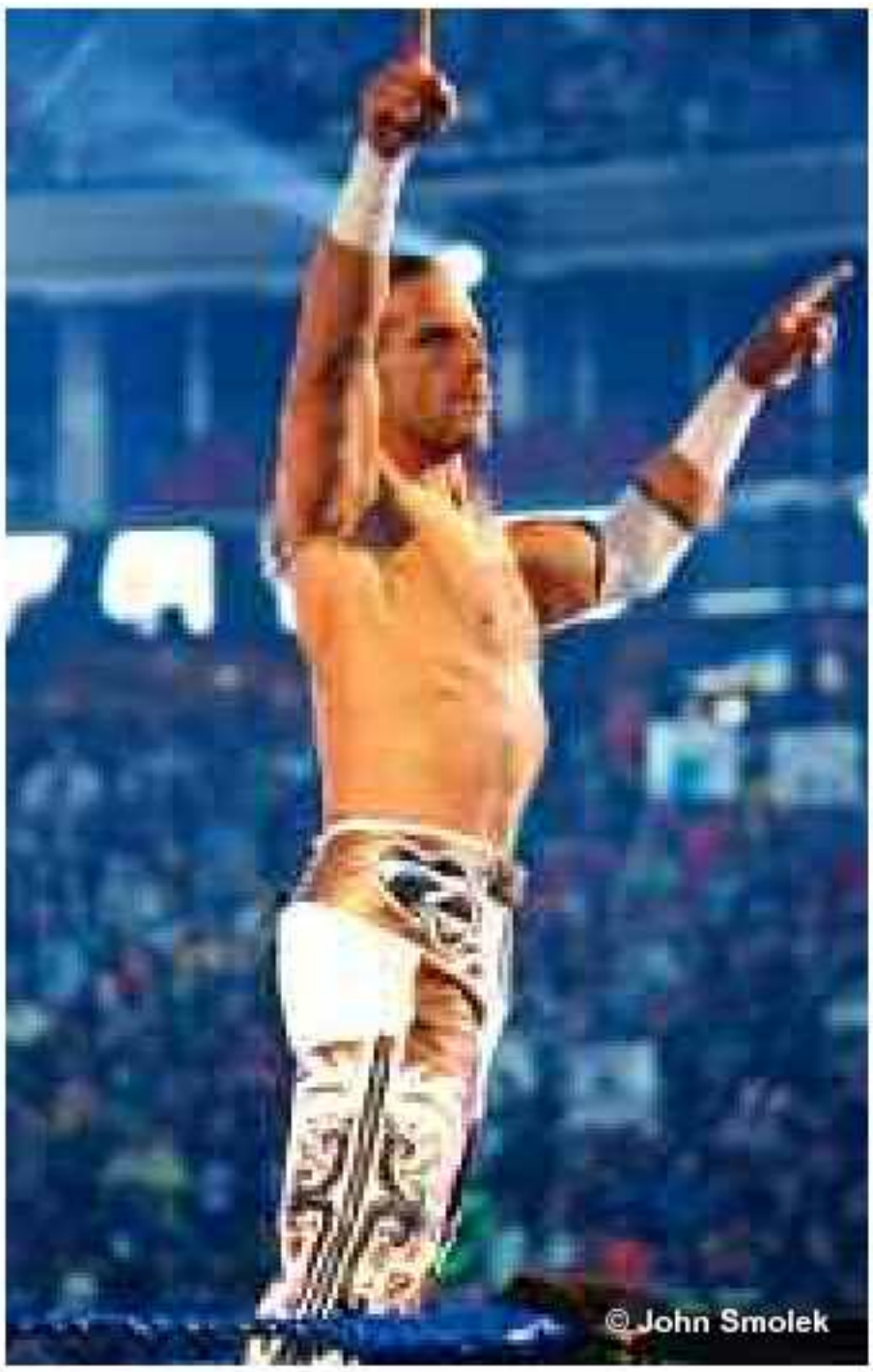
© Aaron Wolf

was rude to me when I tried to talk to him. They were doing a commentate a match event within the fan axxess, which you could take home a tape of your performance but the line was humungous so I didn't do this.

It took about a 4-6 hour drive to go to Ford Field in Detroit, Michigan for WrestleMania 23.

The excitement for me was really enthused especially for my first hall of fame ceremony, it was so exciting and I got to see some real great wrestlers and commentators go into the hall of fame. The speeches were very good, and it really gives some rich history and insight into the business.

I loved the whole weekend. One of the most awesome things was when all of a sudden people in my row looked behind and saw


© John Smolek

Sandman and the rest of the ECW crew coming down our aisle toward the ring.

Watching Bobby Lashley shave Vince's head was also a highlight, he looked hilarious.

I'd recommend the hall of fame for any die hard wrestling fan who wants to learn interesting stories and more about the rich history of the participants. Once you go to a WrestleMania event you will want to go back.

is very hard to get tickets to these events so don't be fooled. Your best bet is to hit the box office or camp out if the event is in your neck of the woods.

It took about a 1 hour plane ride from where I flew out to get to Arizona for WrestleMania 26. While I was really looking forward to the Wrestlemania event, I had low expectations for the hall of fame ceremony.

The Streak vs. Career match was one of the best matches I've ever seen at a mania. I expected HBK to retire but not this early.

I'd recommend going to WrestleMania to any wrestling fan. The whole weekend was amazing.

I'm really looking forward to Wrestlemania 27 HBK going into the hall of fame should be an emotional but epic induction.

The thing that makes me keep going back is I love Wrestling and it is my favorite event of the year. The matches are always top notch. I would recommend going at least once to any hardcore wrestling fan because it truly is a once in a lifetime experience.

WrestleMania 20 – A Bitter-Sweet Symphony, That's Life

by Ari Berenstein

It was easy enough to make the trip to the city from Brooklyn and head into the heart of Manhattan: Thirty Fourth Street and Penn Plaza. It's an hour and fifteen minutes total, with the high point of the ride the inspiring

urban vista of the New York City skyline as the train motors over the East River. It was a far longer journey from those in over 48 states and 16 countries that travelled here, but the trip was no doubt worthwhile, for their mutual destination was World Wrestling Entertainment's Wrestlemania XX at Madison Square Garden.

The line to enter the building stretched from the partially outdoors Rotunda area all the way around 7th Avenue. Usually the entrance of The Garden is busy but moving. Here, no one was going anywhere, at least not until security gave the say-so. Then the WWE fans trickled oh-so-slowly through the bottleneck; screened and thoroughly patted-down before entering into the hallowed halls of The World's Most Famous Arena.

Still, despite the crush, there was a palpable buzz and excitement from everyone waiting to get into the building. Ric Flair inspired "Wooos" travelled among the sections of the crowd like an aural version of The Wave. Rumors and discussion passed back and forth amid shouts and hollers from the concession stands.

Once the screening process was concluded, one could enter the main hall and head towards the inner stadium. In one of those "you had to be there" moments, none other than WWE Legend Tito Santana (who wrestled on the first nine Wrestlemanias) made his way through the jammed corridor where I and many others had lined up. Santana was pleasant and cordial, shaking hands and smiling, though it was clear he didn't expect to be caught up in all of this human traffic.

I was very excited. I was four years old when the first Wrestlemania took place, about a year removed from actually watching my first wrestling match. I was not financially independent enough to purchase a ticket to Wrestlemania X. This was my first opportunity to see the most important wrestling show of the year live and in my own hometown. My $104.50 ticket (before service charges) netted a surprisingly decent seat on the 100 level (the first raised section of seats) in-between the ring and the ramp.

It had been a huge weekend of wrestling action, as I had attended my first-ever Ring of Honor show the previous night in Elizabeth, New Jersey (At Our Best, famous for its quality and infamous for taking place in the midst of the Rob Feinstein scandal that nearly destroyed that promotion). The show was a revelation in enjoying live independent wrestling. However, not even ROH could beat the experience of Wrestlemania in Madison Square Garden.

One of the funnier personal situations that occurred involved two of my cousins who had taken an impromptu bus trip from upstate New York to see the show. They happened to be seated completely on the other side of the arena. It was up to the three of us to run around the building throughout the night, scrambling to find each other amid the many ramps and corridors. Luckily, Wrestlemania XX was a twelve-match card and nearly five hours in length, so there was plenty of filler (such as the "Playboy Evening Gown Match" and Jesse Ventura's interview) and therefore plenty of time to find and catch up with family.

The show began with John Cena (still a rapping white gangsta' at this point, wearing a chain and padlock around his neck—remember that?) winning the United States title from The Big Show to a huge pop. One year later he was winning the biggest title in WWE.

It was somewhat of a surprise to witness The Rock & Sock Connection losing to Evolution fourth from the bottom of the card. Both The Rock and Mick Foley received terrific reactions, but it was Ric Flair who stole the show with his mimicry of The People's Elbow. Batista (who still had hair) was rough around the edges but was showing the signs of promise that would elevate him to the World Heavyweight Title and the main event of Wrestlemania 21.

There were several lowlights during the show, but none as infamous and as much of a historical curiosity as Brock Lesnar (now a

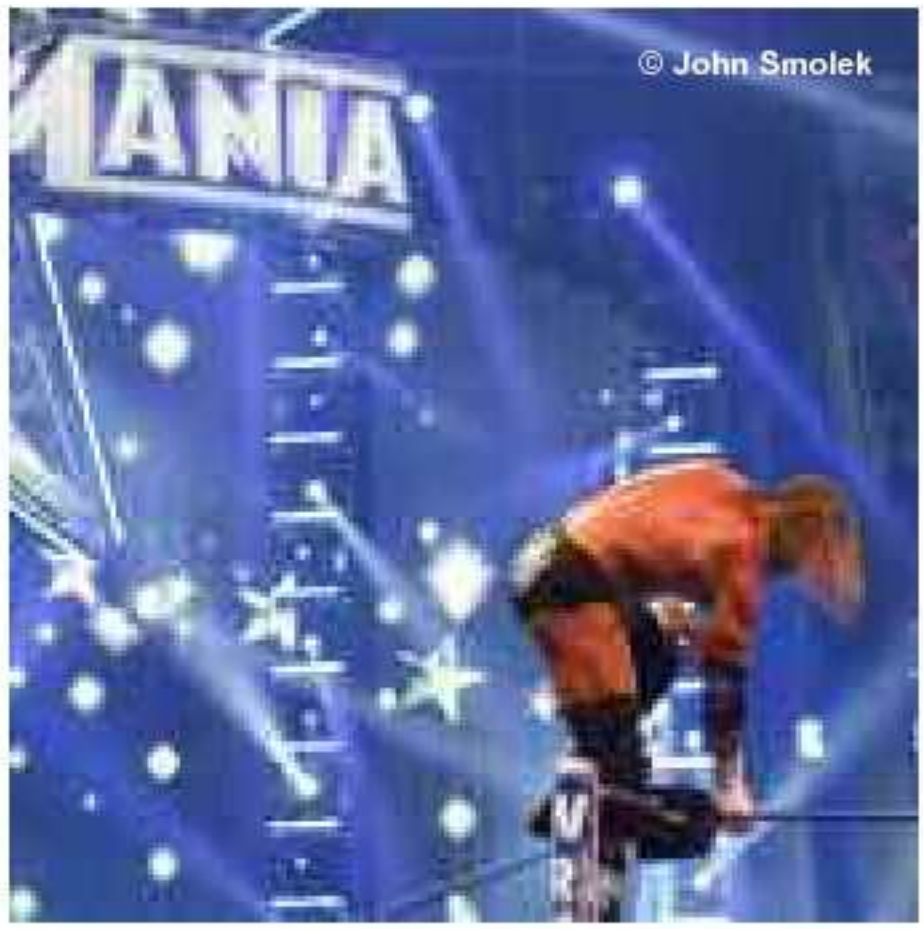
hugely successful Mixed Martial Artist in the UFC) wrestling Bill Goldberg with "Stone Cold" Steve Austin as the special guest referee. Though WWE tried to whitewash the whole incident on DVD, those who watched the show live will never forget one of the more surreal fifteen minutes in wrestling history.

It was as if the 20,000 in attendance suddenly decided to unite in a synchronized display of disgust and rebellion against what was supposed to be an all-time dream match. They all somehow knew that it wasn't just Goldberg's last night with the WWE, but that Brock Lesnar was leaving as well. I was caught in this uncanny rush, not quite knowing how to react to the visceral emotion pouring out of this massive audience.

The fans booed passionately. They shouted "You Sold Out" and "Boring" among other disparaging remarks. Lesnar and Goldberg spent the next five minutes having a staring contest. The fans booed one for doing nothing, then the other for doing nothing in response to the nothing. They cheered mockingly when there was any actual movement. Then they went back to booing. The most positive responses were for a Hulk Hogan impersonator in the crowd who was doing a pitch-perfect pantomime and for Steve Austin, who delivered a perfect farewell gift with a Stone Cold Stunner to each man.

Later on, WWE Champion Eddie Guerrero and Kurt Angle proceeded to unleash a terrific wrestling match and The Undertaker returned as "The Deadman" to fight his brother Kane. Truthfully, this was all about the entrance and the aura of The Undertaker. The rest was fairly un-dramatic, save for those of us that noticed that one of the druids had left his (still lit) torch on the ramp unattended. A production crew member hurriedly ran and doused it with a fire extinguisher-a folly that managed to stay off-screen.

Millions of pieces of confetti dropped from the ceiling of The Garden after Chris Benoit won the World Heavyweight Title, defeating Shawn Michaels and World Heavyweight Champion Triple H in a Triple Threat match.



It was one of the more emotional and passionate title wins in WWE history, for both Benoit and the MSG crowd. Many were moved when Benoit and Eddie Guerrero celebrated in the ring together with their respective championships, but even more were touched when Benoit hugged his wife and son in the middle of the ring after the Pay Per View had gone off the air. It is a sobering and somewhat chilling memory now.

What Wrestlemania XX means today to the history of the promotion and the wrestling industry has been forever and irrevocably changed (and justifiably so) by the tragic deaths of Eddie Guerrero in 2005 and the murder-suicide of Chris, Nancy and Daniel Benoit in 2007. However, back then this show was simply a moment of celebration and reveling.

I had picked up a piece of the confetti that fell onto the floor before departing Madison Square Garden that night. I still have the tickertape, folded in-between the pages of the Wrestlemania XX program. It is now a bitter-sweet symbol of the show and all that happened afterwards.

WrestleMania 22

by David Schmida

I have been soaking up everything that the world of wrestling has had to offer since 1993, for some reason though it never really occurred to me to actually go to WrestleMania and see it live. It took many more years until I decided to put a bit of money together and attend the biggest wrestling event on earth.

Besides noticing numerous advertisements regarding organized trips to the different events, WrestleMania X8 in Toronto played a significant role as a deciding factor. Although I never lost the fever for the sport, I hadn't watched too much current wrestling for a while due to the TV situation in Germany at that time and bought the tape of the show from England. I watched it probably five times the first week as it blew me away.

I decided to finally do it. I was going to attend a WrestleMania.

After postponing it a few times throughout the years, I ended up booking a four-day-trip to WrestleMania 22 in Chicago through the aforementioned agency eight months before the event took place. Why so early? Of course I fell for the oldest trick in the book: the early bird discount.

I can highly recommend doing it through an agency. I preferred to pay a bit more and not have to worry about anything else.

The whole thing cost me about 2500 Euros and it was worth every single cent. They organized the tickets to the Hall of Fame ceremony, WrestleMania and for Raw on Monday night.

The day had arrived. Four days before the big night I took a train to Frankfurt, Germany to catch my plane to London. There I met with the tour escort and the other people heading to the "Granddaddy of them all" and we boarded the plane to Chicago. In total to get it took about ten hours to finally get to the hotel in Chicago.

The Hall of Fame ceremony was perfect. Bret Hart was inducted by Steve Austin that night and since Hart was one of the first guys I ever saw wrestling you can imagine how it felt. I still remember the TV guys waving at him to signal him that he should get to the end of his speech but he didn't pay much attention. Later that night, I realized how much they had to cut it in order to be able to include it in the TV show. All in all, it was a perfect, emotional night and couldn't have been a better kick off for a great weekend.

The excitement of actually attending WrestleMania still lives in me today and I'm really not overstating. I didn't book ringside tickets since I thought 300 Euros for a ticket in the first rows of the ranks was enough. Add to that that you're not guaranteed to end up in the first row when you order ringside tickets.

THE EXCITEMENT OF ACTUALLY ATTENDING WRESTLEMANIA STILL LIVES IN ME TODAY....

I had almost perfect sight sitting about sixty meters away from the ring and I can tell you: those fireworks were hot. I'm still very happy about the fact that the 22nd edition of WrestleMania took place in a normal arena rather than one of these big domes like in Toronto at WrestleMania X8. Although WrestleMania taking place in a dome made me decide to attend it, I wouldn't have had such a good sight with the tickets I had in an arena like in Detroit one year later.

Having had such a good time at this trip, I'd definitely go again. Nevertheless, I'd choose carefully which edition I'd attend, taking the host city and the size of the venue into consideration. Maybe WrestleMania 30, provided that it takes place at Madison Square Garden in New York, will make me pack my bags again.

Enjoy the show folks!!!

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